



## THE MAMMALS OF TURVEY

Mammals are much more difficult to get to grips with than are birds, for some obvious reasons: - many of them are small and extremely good at hiding themselves and most of them are creatures of the night rather than of the day. Nevertheless, my total for Turvey is now around a respectable two dozen after some eight years here as a resident. Pride of place goes to the two latest additions: a harvest mouse found drowned in a bucket, by the chapel, and a water shrew seen scuttling across a car port by Bec House. Both of those would be good to see anywhere but especially in Bedfordshire where records are usually of less than a handful of each per year. Other mice and shrews often come to my attention via the cat, if one can get them before only the cuts are left - though he doesn't seem so keen on the shrews. His tally so far includes wood mice and pygmy and common shrews, but surprisingly, as yet, no confirmed house mice. He's also been known to bring in rabbits and several long-eared bats, and two species of vole, a short-tailed field vole and a couple of bank voles. The latter included one brought in through a skylight which was eventually rescued from inside a chair leg! Other small mammals consist of at least two more species of bat. There seems to be a small resident population of pipistrelle bats and larger bats - without prominent ears - have been seen on at least a couple of occasions, two of these were very large and may have been noctules. Going up the scale a little, rats are occasionally seen and this once included the alarming sight of the lid of a compost bin going up and down, apparently all by itself, until a closer approach made the rat responsible dive for cover.

Of the larger mammals fox and muntjac deer are perhaps the most readily seen. The former especially at dawn and dusk and the latter often as road casualties. It's said one can smell where a fox has been but there was no mistaking a visit to the chicken run by a fox a couple of years ago, we were left with several scattered corpses and two very frightened cockerels in the chicken hut! Other deer include regular sightings of Chinese Water Deer by a local gamekeeper and a recent report of a roe deer in Great Oaks Wood. The Chinese Water Deer have been seen over several years now, once by me, and seem to be spreading north from the Astwood direction. The roe deer is well dispersed elsewhere in Britain, but a newcomer to Bedfordshire in the last few years. There is also a fine captive herd of red deer at Picts Hill. Badgers are also resident in the parish, but are difficult for a diurnal monk to study. I've seen only one so far emerging from a regularly used sett within a ride of the Abbey. Stoats and weasels are usually seen each year and give themselves away by their amazing hyper-activity interrupted by sudden stops to take stock of the observer. Grey squirrels are all too abundant, depending upon one's point of view. Hares too are relatively common here compared to large tracts of the countryside where they have been wiped out by disease and changes in land use. It's not unusual to see up to a dozen or more in some spots, but I've yet to see them boxing.

This brings me to the last two on the list, hedgehogs and moles. Hedgehogs are frequent visitors to the garden and can be incredibly noisy and surprisingly fleet of foot. There's a theory that the reason they get run over on the road is because when they see a vehicle they stop trying to cross the road and try to outrun the vehicle instead. I have my doubts. Dead moles and mole runs are often

found but I've not yet seen one alive.

This list is not a complete one because there are almost certainly mink to be accounted for, and possibly rare species of bat and hopefully, one day we will hear of the return of otters to the Ouse at Turvey - and why not? it's a wonderful river.

Bro. John.

P.S. The cat's just caught and killed a stoat - he's not such a wimp after all.

