

Checklist of the Mammals, Reptiles and Amphibians of the Harrogate District



Checklist of the Mammals, Reptiles and Amphibians of the Harrogate District

with extracts from

The Vertebrate fauna of the Nidd Valley (1894)

by R. Fortune F.Z.S.

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Introduction

Almost a century has passed since publication of what appears to be the one and only comprehensive checklist of the vertebrate fauna of the 'Harrogate district'. This frequently quoted work was prepared by local naturalist Riley Fortune and appeared in 1894 in Harry Speight's fascinating book entitled "Nidderdale and the Garden of the Nidd: A Yorkshire Rhineland". For the first time Fortune attempted to review the entire vertebrate fauna of "the Nidd watershed" and the list included birds and fishes as well as mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Many naturalists have used the list as a yardstick against which to measure fluctuations in the status and distribution of local birds and animals and, in all probability, the value of this and similar records will increase with the further passage of time. Unfortunately copies of Speight's book are now collectors' items and on those rare occasions when one is offered for

sale the asking price is extremely high. For that reason — and to enable 'now' and 'then' comparisons to be made — this booklet not only contains a long-overdue checklist of the mammals, reptiles and amphibians to be found in the Harrogate district today but also a verbatim extract from Fortune's 1894 list.

The 1986 compilation is derived from data published in Harrogate and District Naturalists' Society Annual Reports for the years 1981 to 1985 inclusive and the author's unpublished personal records.

Current conventions are followed regarding the format and presentation of the 1986 list and readers will probably notice that the English and Latin names of some animals have altered somewhat over the years. To avoid any misunderstanding it is perhaps worth mentioning that Fortune's "Long Eared Bat" is today's Brown Long-eared Bat; "Reddish Grey Bat" has become Natterer's Bat;

"Lesser Shrew" is now known as Pygmy Shrew; "Red Field Vole" as Bank Vole and "Common Snake" as Grass Snake. Several other alterations to nomenclature have been made but the only other possible confusion may relate to the "Squirrel" which, in 1894, was the native Red Squirrel.

Last recorded locally in 1963, the Red Squirrel is one of five mammals featured in the 1894 list which are now probably extinct in the Harrogate district. The demise of the Red Squirrel coincided with a national decline in range and numbers and this is thought to have been a consequence of disease. Optimists continue to search for the Dormouse — last seen locally in 1959 on the western outskirts of Harrogate — but habitat loss at former strongholds has almost certainly contributed to its disappearance. Fears expressed by Riley Fortune that the Lesser Horseshoe Bat could become extinct because of the "greed of collectors"

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appears to have been well founded and recent explorations of former roost sites have failed to find this scarce animal. There is no doubt that the Polecat and Pine Marten are long gone from the area and indeed both species are now national rarities.

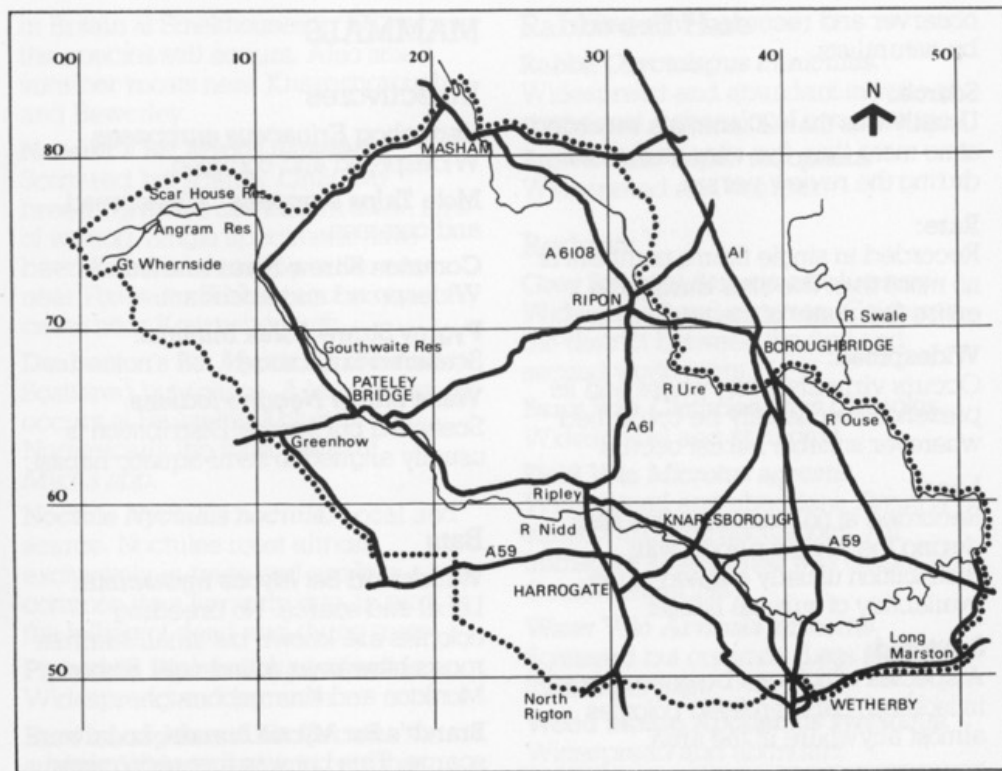
To some extent the losses are compensated for by the addition of six 'new' mammals to the current list together with the re-colonisation of the area by four mammals which were thought to be either extinct or not present in the wild in 1894. Whether, as Fortune suggested, the Badger actually was extinct in 1894 is doubtful but happily there are a few well-established setts in and around Harrogate today. Although Roe, Fallow and Red Deer had all apparently occurred in a wild state prior to 1894, Roe received no more than a mention in Fortune's introductory notes and was completely absent from his checklist, Fallow included on the strength of two enparked herds and Red because of

a herd at Studley Royal and the sightings of escaped animals. Re-colonisation of the area by Roe has occurred during the last twenty years and several small herds of feral Fallow and Red Deer are also established in suitable woodland.

Six species not listed in 1894 appear on the current checklist with reference having already been made to Roe Deer. Two distinct races of Sika Deer are also present in the district today. The occasional sightings of Japanese Sika to the west of Ripon are thought to be descendants of stock held captive at Allerton Park until the mid-'60s; and the flourishing herd of Manchurian Sika at Studley Park has grown to its present size from the seven animals originally introduced in 1973. Grey Squirrels were first introduced into Yorkshire in 1906 and are now one of the most regularly seen mammals in and around Harrogate. Another trans-Atlantic intruder, the American Mink, has enjoyed a similar success

and now that attempts to eradicate them have finally been abandoned it rather looks as though this unwelcome alien is also on the list to stay. In all probability, two other 'newcomers' — Brandt's and Daubenton's Bat — were present but overlooked by Fortune.

In the introduction to his 1894 list Riley Fortune acknowledged that "a great deal of work has been done, but there is still scope for much useful investigation and discovery". How right he was. And I make no apology for echoing those same sentiments in 1986!



Although neither a map nor precise description of Riley Fortune's review area were included with his work, various references made to places in the text and checklist suggest a close similarity to the present Harrogate and District Naturalists' Society study area shown alongside.

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Although a great deal of knowledge can be gleaned from Riley Fortune's review it is unfortunate that no "definitions" are given for the words chosen to describe the status and distribution of animals. Consequently we are left to speculate, for example, as to just how common an animal described as being "common" really was in 1894!

The following definitions relate to the period of the current review — 1981 to 1985 inclusive — and it should be remembered that these might not be quite what Riley Fortune had in mind.

Abundant:

Usually associated with a species that has a "widespread" distribution and is numerically plentiful to the extent that it is virtually impossible to quantify population density.

Common:

Numerous to the extent that animals — or signs of their presence — are frequently seen by the casual

observer and recorded with ease by naturalists.

Scarce:

Usually less than 20 animals recorded at no more than five sites each year during the review period.

Rare:

Recorded in single figure numbers at no more than five sites during the entire five years of the review.

Widespread:

Occurs virtually everywhere and its presence can usually be confirmed wherever suitable habitat occurs.

Local:

Recorded at no more than five sites during the review period with distribution usually aligned to the availability of suitable habitat.

Scattered:

A species which can be encountered in isolated, habitat-related colonies almost anywhere in the area.

MAMMALS

Insectivores

Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus*.
Widespread and common.

Mole *Talpa europaea*. Widespread and common.

Common Shrew *Sorex araneus*.
Widespread and abundant.

Pygmy Shrew *Sorex minutus*.
Scattered but scarce.

Water Shrew *Neomys fodiens*.
Scattered but scarce. Distribution is usually aligned to semi-aquatic habitat.

Bats

Whiskered Bat *Myotis mystacinus*.
Local and scarce. No breeding colonies are known but small summer roosts have been found near Bishop Monkton and Knaresborough.

Brandt's Bat *Myotis brandti*. Local and scarce. This bat was first recognised

in Britain at Smelthouses in 1972 where the species still occurs. Also small summer roosts near Knaresborough and Beverley.

Natterer's Bat *Myotis nattereri*.

Scattered but scarce. Only two breeding roosts are known at the time of writing. Single specimens have been found hibernating at two sites near Fountains Abbey and in two caves near Knaresborough.

Daubenton's Bat *Myotis daubentoni*.

Scattered but scarce. A large roost occurs at Fountains Abbey. Numerically the most plentiful *Myotis* spp.

Noctule *Nyctalus noctula*. Local and scarce. Noctules roost almost exclusively in trees and are less common than formerly due, in part, to the felling of dead and dying trees.

Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*.

Widespread and common.

Brown Long-eared Bat *Plecotus*

***auritus*.** Widespread and common.

Rabbit and Hare

Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*.

Widespread and abundant in spite of occasional outbreaks of myxomatosis.

Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*

Widespread and common.

Rodents

Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

Widespread and common. Colonised the district between the first and second world wars.

Bank Vole *Clethrionomys glareolus*.

Widespread and abundant.

Field Vole *Microtus agrestis*.

Widespread and abundant. Status is subject to cyclic fluctuations. An immature albino male was caught at Gouthwaite in 1983.

Water Vole *Arvicola terrestris*.

Scattered but common. Less plentiful than in the past.

Wood Mouse *Apodemus sylvaticus*.

Widespread and abundant.

Harvest Mouse *Micromys minutus*.

Scattered in low lying areas but quite common near Bishop Monkton and east of Knaresborough.

House Mouse *Mus musculus*.

Widespread and common.

Common Rat *Rattus norvegicus*.

Widespread and common.

Carnivores

Fox *Vulpes vulpes*. Widespread and common.

Stoat *Mustela erminea*. Widespread and common.

Weasel *Mustela nivalis*. Widespread and common.

American Mink *Mustela vison*.

Widespread and common. Has systematically colonised virtually all rivers and streams in the Harrogate district since the second world war.

Badger *Meles meles*. Generally widespread and common but appears to be absent from upper Nidderdale

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and surrounding moorland.

Otter *Lutra lutra*. Local and very rare.

Even-toed Ungulates

Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*. Scattered but scarce. A large captive herd is emparked at Studley Royal and feral animals occupy suitable woodland to the north, south and west of Ripon.

Japanese Sika *Cervus nippon nippon*. Local and rare. Sika seen from time to time in the Ripon area are thought to be descendants of the herd held captive at Allerton Park until the mid-'60s.

Manchurian Sika *Cervus nippon mantchuricus*. With the exception of occasional escapes the only Manchurian Sika present in the area are those in Studley Royal park.

Fallow Deer *Dama dama*. Scattered and quite common. Emparked herds are today present at Studley Royal, Ripley and Swinton with small feral herds occupying suitable woodland throughout the district.

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*.

Widespread and common. Rapid colonisation of the district since its reappearance in 1968.

REPTILES

Scaly Reptiles

Common Lizard *Lacerta vivipara*.

Scattered and common in upland areas north and west of Harrogate.

Slow Worm *Anguis fragilis*. Scattered distribution in Nidd valley as far downstream as Knaresborough with occasional records from around Ripon. Scarce.

Adder *Vipera berus*. Scattered distribution on moorland in upper Nidderdale.

Grass Snake *Natrix natrix*. Local and very rare but still occurs at one site on the Vale of York near Wilstrop.

AMPHIBIANS

Tailed Amphibians

Great Crested Newt *Triturus cristatus*.

Scattered but apparently absent from upper Nidderdale. Generally scarce but more common around Markington and north-west of Ripon.

Palmate Newt *Triturus helveticus*.

Appears to be absent east of Knaresborough but scattered and common elsewhere.

Smooth Newt *Triturus vulgaris*.

Widespread and common.

Tailless Amphibians

Common Toad *Bufo bufo*. Widespread and common.

Common Frog *Rana temporaria*.

Widespread and common. Along with Palmate and Smooth Newts the species has benefited considerably from the recent construction of ornamental garden ponds.

Extracts from
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by R. Fortune F.Z.S.

Honorary Secretary, Vertebrate Section of the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union

and published in 1894 in
*Nidderdale and the garden of the Nidd:
A Yorkshire Rhineland*

edited by H. Speight



..1894....

For the first time an attempt is now made to deal with the Vertebrate Fauna of the whole of the Nidd watershed. The country embraced is extremely varied in character, and has therefore considerable attractions for the various forms of animal and bird life; while in respect to the Nidd, it would be difficult to find a river of the same size which has a greater variety of fish in its waters. Small portions of this area have frequently received attention and have been dealt with more or less efficiently; it would therefore be just as well to take note of what has been done.

Lucas, in his *Studies in Nidderdale*, refers in a rather desultory manner to the birds of upper Nidderdale, and gives a list of the species he met with between the years 1867 and 1872. In *Lays and Leaves of the Forest*, by the Rev. Thos. Parkinson, F.R.Hist.S., published in 1882, is a chapter devoted to the Wild Animals of the Forest of Knaresborough, a great part of which

is included in the district under notice. A pamphlet published in 1885, entitled *The Birds of Harrogate and District*, by the present writer, is chiefly devoted to what may be termed the central portions of the district. By far the best contribution to the Fauna of Nidderdale was published in *The Naturalist* for July, 1886, entitled *Upper Nidderdale and its Fauna*, by Messrs. W. Eagle Clarke, F.L.S., M.B.O.U., W. D. Roebuck, F.L.S., and William Storey. Mr. Storey has devoted almost a lifetime to the investigation of upper Nidderdale and has done a large amount of valuable work. In addition to his share in the production of the paper referred to, he has at various times contributed many interesting and valuable notes to *The Naturalist*, *The Zoologist*, etc. He has also rendered me important assistance with the present work.

In addition to the above, numerous notes and articles concerning the Fauna of the Nidd valley, contributed

by myself and others, have frequently appeared in *The Naturalist*, *The Zoologist*, *The Field*, *Land and Water*, *The Practical Naturalist*, *Transactions of the Harrogate Naturalists' Society*, *Leeds Mercury Weekly Supplement*, etc.

The limit of space admits of little more being given here than what is, practically, a list of species only, and which makes no pretence at being perfect. A great deal of work has been done, but there is still scope for much useful investigation and discovery.

The writer may add that being intimately acquainted with almost every yard of the district, he has hitherto had no impediment placed in the way of his researches; indeed, quite the reverse has been the case, for when permission has been asked to obtain access to any private estate, it has invariably been granted. To these courteous privileges are largely due many records which might otherwise have escaped attention.

MAMMALIA

The number of species found in our district reaches the respectable total of thirty-one, of which number twenty-seven, if we include the Fallow Deer, may be considered as at present existing. Three of the number, viz., Marten, Polecat, and Badger, are now probably extinct; a friend, however, who is capable of judging, assures me that he saw a Polecat in the Crimple Valley last Spring. The Red and Fallow Deer are quite extinct as wild species inhabiting the district but both occasionally stray away from the neighbouring deer parks and are found at large in the dale.

Records in existence prove that many of the larger animals formerly existed in a wild state, as for instance the Wolf, Wild Boar, Wild White Cattle, Red Deer, Fallow Deer, Roe Deer, and Wild Cat; while a spot called Beaver Dyke, in Haverah Park, leads one to suppose that these

creatures formerly existed there.

The number of species of Bats will in all probability be increased. Large numbers frequent the valley between Ripley and Goldsborough. Sometimes when fishing at Scotton Banks, in the evening, I have seen hundreds flitting about, some of them uttering at intervals a peculiar scream not unlike that of the Swift. The Lesser Horse-shoe Bat first obtained a place in the Yorkshire Fauna by the discovery of a specimen by Mr. Storey (who has paid particular attention to these animals) near Pateley Bridge. It is a matter of sincere regret, to think that this rare Bat will soon share the same fate as many of our rarer birds, and become extinct, entirely through the greed of collectors and self-styled naturalists.

Otters, though subject to much persecution, still manage to hold their own in the valley. The damage done by these interesting creatures is greatly exaggerated. I have frequently examined remnants of their meals, but

have rarely found the remains of a trout; almost exclusively they have consisted of coarse fish, chub in particular. They are extremely fond of eels, and do an immense amount of good to the owners or lessees of trout streams by ridding the waters of these devourers of trout ova.

Hares and Rabbits, as a natural result of the passing of the Ground Game Acts, have greatly decreased in numbers. I am afraid that the Bill, enforcing a close time for Hares, will not assist these animals in regaining their lost ground, as it does not prevent the shooting, but merely the sale during the fence months. Farmers therefore, shoot them all the year round, and declare, like one old farmer once knowingly remarked to me, that "hares and bacon are in season all the year round".

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Lesser Horse-shoe Bat *Rhinolophus hipposideros*. Found in several localities in the neighbourhood of Pateley Bridge. Mr. James Ingleby, writing to *The Naturalist*, on September 15th, 1888, "regrets that it is becoming scarce". As it was only discovered a year or two before, it is greatly to be regretted that the greed of collectors so soon threatens this interesting species with extinction.

Long Eared Bat *Plecotus auritus*. Fairly common throughout the district. All the bats are known locally by the names of FLITTER-MOUSE, and BLACK BEAR-AWAY.

Noctule *Vesperugo noctula*. Not uncommon in the lower parts of the dale.

Pipistrelle *Vesperugo pipistrellus*. Abundant.

Whiskered Bat *Vespertilio mystacinus*. Abundant. Mr. James Ingleby records seeing nearly 100 come from a hole in a building at Warsill.

Reddish Grey Bat *Vespertilio nattereri*. Has been recorded several times from the upper parts of the dale by Mr. Storey.

Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus*. Local, URCHEN, PRICKLY-BACK OTCHEN. Common. The old belief, that it sucks the cows for their milk, still has a firm hold in the district.

Mole *Talpa europaea*. Local, MOWDY WARP, MOWDY. Very abundant. Cream coloured examples are occasionally caught.

Common Shrew *Sorex tetragonurus*. Local, SHREW-MOUSE. Abundant.

Lesser Shrew *Sorex minutus*. Fairly common, though not nearly as abundant as the former species.

Water Shrew *Crossopus fodiens*. Thinly distributed over the whole district. More abundant in some parts than in others.

Fox *Canis vulpes*. Abundant.

Marten *Martes sylvestris*. Probably

extinct. The last recorded specimen was killed at Ripley. A year or two ago one was shot on the Studley estate.

Weasel *Mustela vulgaris*. Local, MOUSE-HUNTER, MOUSE-WEASEL. Abundant.

Stoat *Mustela erminea*. Local, ERMINE, POWCAT. Abundant.

Polecat *Mustela putoria*. Extremely rare, if not extinct.

Otter *Lutra vulgaris*. More plentiful than is generally supposed. I hardly ever go fishing without seeing traces of these animals.

Badger *Meles taxus*. The last recorded example was killed at Brimham, in March, 1885. Probably now extinct.

Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*. Mr. Storey, writing in *The Naturalist* for February, 1886, records a pair of these animals in Harewell Wood, in June, 1885; escapes probably from Studley. He states that they have been seen in these woods, and the neighbouring ones of Sawley for the past seven

years. Formerly a herd was kept in the Park at Allerton. "Col. Thornton and three gentlemen with him had very near been killed by a Red Deer, the evening Mr. Brown went to Allerton". (Abstract from a letter written from Ribston early this century.)

Fallow Deer *Cervus dama*. Two herds only, one at Ripley and the other at Allerton, are to be found in the district. Those at Ripley are of a curious black variety, the colour possibly being caused by the method of feeding.

Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*. Common.

Dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius*. Local, and not common.

Harvest Mouse *Mus minutus*. Included on the evidence of Mr. Storey, who has proved conclusively to me that it has been obtained several times in upper Nidderdale. I myself have a distinct recollection of finding a nest of this species in a cornfield in Oakdale, in my boyhood.

Long-tailed Field Mouse *Mus sylvaticus*. Very abundant.

House Mouse *Mus musculus*. Abundant.

Brown Rat *Mus decumanus*. Local, RATTEN. Very abundant; in some places too much so to be pleasant.

Water Vole *Arvicola amphibia*. Local, WATER RATTEN. Very common.

Field Vole *Arvicola agrestis*. Local, SHORT-TAILED FIELD MOUSE. Abundant.

Red Field Vole *Arvicola glareolus*. Thinly distributed over the whole district.

Hare *Lepus europaeus*. Thanks to the Ground Game Bill not nearly so abundant as formerly.

Rabbit *Lepus cuniculus*. Plentiful, but like the Hare, and from the same cause, greatly decreased in numbers.

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

We have not a great number of species of Reptiles and Amphibians, but what we have are fairly numerous. Vipers are plentiful on the moorlands and waste grounds. The common snake is confined to the district below Knaresborough; formerly it occurred in the neighbourhood of Birk Crag, but for some unaccountable reason it has entirely disappeared from that locality. Frogs and toads are not so numerous as formerly, toads particularly. The chief reason for this decrease is the fact, that when at the beginning of April, they awake from their winter torpor they make their way in large numbers to the reservoirs for the purpose of spawning; the keepers, who are well aware of this fact, keep a sharp look out for them, making frequent tours round, with a scoop and a bucket containing salt. The toads are lifted out with the scoop and dropped into the bucket where they soon perish;

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hundreds are destroyed in this manner, and thus through this ignorant and foolish practice the water is cleared of creatures, which there is no doubt do an immense amount of good work in cleansing and purifying the water.

Reptiles

Common Snake *Tropidonotus natrix*.

Thinly distributed in that part of the district below Knaresborough. Formerly it was found near Birk Crag, but it seems to have disappeared from that locality entirely.

Viper *Vipera berus*. Local, ADDER, HAG-WORM. Common throughout the district and especially upon the heaths and moorlands.

Common Lizard *Lacerta vivipara*.
Common.

Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis*. Local, BLIND-WORM, HAG-WORM.
Common. Grows to a large size in the woods between Nidd Viaduct and

Knaresborough.

Amphibians

Great Crested Newt *Triton cristatus*.

Local, ASK, ASKERD. Fairly numerous throughout the district. Among the country people all newts have a reputation of being poisonous.

Smooth Newt *Triton taeniatus*. Local, ASK, ASKERD. Very common.

Palmated Newt *Triton palmipes*.

Common in the neighbourhood of Harrogate. All three species are very plentiful in that locality; indeed it is difficult to say which of the three is the most plentiful.

Common Toad *Bufo vulgaris*. Fairly abundant.

Common Frog *Rana temporaria*.
Very common.

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Further Reading

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Photographs

Front cover: Red Deer stag.

Page 9: Male Pipistrelle.

Back cover: Male Great Crested Newt.

