



## Just normal

Every scientific publication is preceded by observation of a phenomenon. Questions about it have to be properly framed and the results clearly understood before an article can be produced. Very unusual phenomena tend to be noticed earlier, explored earlier, and the results published earlier. Less unusual phenomena that appear to be 'just normal', can often go unnoticed for a long time. This is particularly true of situations where changes of biological phenomena occur very slowly; when the crucial step of posing questions may not be taken and the phenomenon may not be investigated for a long time, if at all.

This issue of *Lutra* contains examples of both unusual, as well as rather more usual, phenomena. Striking examples of the first are given in *Longevity records in the red fox* by Jaap Mulder, *Partial albinism in the red squirrel* (*Sciurus vulgaris* Linnaeus, 1758) by Bauke Hoekstra and *Evidence of lesser horseshoe bat* (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*) *predation by otter* (*Lutra lutra*) *in a Welsh cave system* by Dan Forman et al.; all these are noteworthy observations. Yet there may be many other unpublished observations or studies of the ages of red foxes, of non-albino red squirrels, or otter spraints without traces of lesser horseshoe bats. These phenomena were not published, or maybe not even investigated in depth, because they appeared to be just normal.

*Long-term population trends of rabbits* (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) *on Pleistocene sands in the*

*central and northern Netherlands* by Rob Bijlsma, is an exceptionally good example of what dedicated, consistent observation can achieve. This author described a phenomenon that is not based on a single observation of a rabbit but on a long and valuable list of observations, gathered over many years. Through these observations the author provides this edition of *Lutra* with a pearl. When he started his observations in 1974 he could not have foreseen how, 30 years later, disease, severe winters or predators would affect the long-term development trend of several populations of rabbits. Students or scientific employees of research institutes can perhaps spend five to ten years on long trend observations. A period of thirty years is very exceptional. However, observer bias can cause problems in comparing numbers over the years. The oft-cited long-term trend derived from more than 65 years of counting hibernating bats in the marl pits in Zuid-Limburg is impressive. However, improvements in the amount of light emitted by flashlights hinders a precise comparison of numbers of identified bats. Perhaps only the list of stranded cetaceans, carefully started by Van Deinse, shows no bias, at least for the bigger cetaceans.

Generally, there is a need for studies and publications on long-term trends in all sorts of mammal populations. The work of Jeremy Kiszka et al. in their *Distribution and status of small cetaceans along the French Channel coasts: using opportunistic records for a preliminary*

assessment is hopefully the start of a long series of observations that in the future will provide interesting insights into changes in the populations and distribution of small cetaceans.

Three book reviews are presented in this issue of *Lutra*, two of which focus on herbivores. Maurice Hoffmann reviews the PhD thesis *Herbivores as mediators of their environment. The impact of large and small species on vegetation dynamics* by Liesbeth Bakker. It explores the intricate relation between three herbivorous mammals: cattle, rabbit and common vole. In another book review Bart Nolet reports on Dries Kuijper's PhD thesis *Small herbivores losing control*. It studies the plant-herbivore interactions of cattle, geese and hares along the natural productivity gradient on the small Dutch isle of Schiermonnikoog. For those interested in historical aspects of cetaceans, early marine "biologists", and ichthyology the review by Erwin Kompanje et al. of *Het Walvisboek. Walvissen en andere zeewezens beschreven door Adriaen*

*Coenen in 1585* gives a concise impression of Kees Lankester's findings.

Earlier issues of this journal, especially in the first decades, also presented articles on non-European mammal species. *New records of *Lalidens salimalii* (Chiroptera; Pteropodidae) in the Western Ghats, India* by Juliet Vanitharani et al. resumes this tradition and demonstrates that the editorial board is still interested in manuscripts dealing with mammals outside Europe. This is especially true for genera related to European species or articles with a special interest for members of the *Society for the Study and Conservation of Mammals*.

In the summer of 2004 Steve Geelhoed was appointed as assistant of the editorial board. Steve has much experience in publishing nature journals and will specifically focus on improving the graphic content of the journal. He will also be our key-person linking the board with the office of the *Society for the Study and Conservation of Mammals*.

