# Lucky Leveret and Marauding Magpies

K. Burden, 'Oak Cottage', 3 Primrose Vale, Knottingley.

A friend of the writer was walking through the wintry countryside near Cridling Stubbs (SE/520215) on the 25th of February 1986, when his attention was drawn first to the strange behaviour of three magpies *(Pica pica)*, then to a brown hare *(Lepus europaeus)* that was running at speed over snow covered ground, towards the birds. The magpies, quite unaware of the fast approaching hare, were running excitedly around something, which was out of view of the observer, and at which one of the birds ran in and pecked at intervals.

Without slackening speed, the hare dashed in amongst the magpies, which hurriedly took wing but did not fly far, alighting again a short distance away. The watcher then thought that the hare had seen him, for it galloped to the edge of the field.

In a very short space of time the magpies were back at the spot where they were first seen, behaving as before. Puzzled by what he had just witnessed, the man walked forward towards the engrossed birds. As he approached, the birds again took wing and on this intervention completely left the scene. In a shallow depression, the man found a tiny leveret, which surprisingly, showed no visible signs of injury from the pecks it must have received.

The tiny creature was still in its exposed position when the man returned a considerable time later with his wife. One would have thought that by this time its mother would have moved it to a safer place. The adult hare's lack of response would seem to confirm that it had indeed seen the watching man and that fear of him had prevented its return.

Foot note: A survey of hedgehog road mortalities run by the author in the Lower Aire Valley during the years 1980 - 1982, found that the incidence of avian scavengers feeding on road kill mammalian corpses was low, but at the top of the list was the magpie. (Writer's data).



# Just a minute

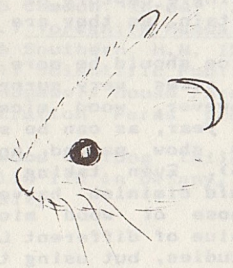
C.A. Howes, Museum and Art Gallery, Doncaster.

In the course of answering a routine natural history enquiry I had cause to refer to the extensive series of archives belonging to the Doncaster Naturalist's Society. Amongst the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd November 1955 was a report by Mr E.F. Gilmour (a previous director of Doncaster Museum) of an albino field vole *(Microtis agrestis)* caught by a cat at Askern, just north of Doncaster (SE/5613).

Occurrences of albinism in wild rodents are most unusual, indeed the only other 'recent' record for wild voles seems to be the immature male reported by Messrs Counter, Damper and Deaton (Imprint, 1983 No.2:6) live trapped on the marsh at Gouthwaite Reservoir Nature Reserve in October 1983.

Albinism in bank voles *(Clethrionomys glareolus)* is also rarely encountered, though the commercial pet world succeeded in obtaining a breeding stock some years ago.

In February 1980 Michael Jackson, the joiner at Doncaster Museum, purchased a pair of totally albino bank voles at a major rabbit and cavy show held at Doncaster racecourse. The pair fed well on cereals, green vegetables, raw apple and raw carrot. They matured and bred, producing a litter of two in October and the following year a litter of four, all albinos. Sadly no precise dates were recorded.

The young were donated to Bentley Environmental Studies Centre, but during the winter of 1981-82 the entire stock (the original pair and subsequent young) died.

The origin of the stock was not ascertained though the dealer proclaimed them to be most unusual - "you'll not see anything like these again".