Small Mammal Records from Hopewell House Farm in March, 1986.

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The Yorkshire Mammal Group's penultimate trap in the six year survey at Hopewell House Farm, near Knaresborough (SE/3557) proved very noteworthy. The total captures for the weekend 21st-23rd of March are shown in the table below, along with those from this site in March 1985.

SPECIES	1986	1985
Harvest mouse *(Micromys minutus)*	8	-
Wood mouse *(Apodemus sylvaticus)*	2	1
Bank vole *(Clethrionomys glareolus)*	33	3
Field vole *(Microtus agrestis)*	8	13
Common shrew *(Sorex araneus)*	48	8
Pygmy shrew *(Sorex minutus)*	4	2

The habitat is that of a young hillside plantation of small coniferous and deciduous trees, with a well developed undergrowth. A stream runs through the site and there is a small pond nearby. Sharp (1984) gives a detailed description.

It was wonderful and surprising to see so many harvest mice, especially after such a harsh winter. We trapped them before at this site in 1983 and 1984, but only one individual on each occasion. Last summer we found a nest containing young by the pond, but none ventured into our traps. Perhaps the extreme weather this year forced them to forage more daringly and thus be caught. Corbet and Southern (1977) suggest that harvest mice may use the runways of other small mammals when the vegetation dies back. There were at least 4 individuals, these being recorded on Sunday morning. Whether they were recaptures of the 3 caught the previous night, or the single capture of Saturday morning, is impossible to ascertain, as they are too delicate to be marked.

That harvest mice should be more numerous in our traps than wood mice seems very surprising and is a new result for this site. However, wood mice do seem to be scarce at this time of year, as can be seen from the table above. Their populations show marked annual fluctuations (Sharp in Delany 1985). Even taking this into account, surely a cold winter would diminish harvest mouse numbers more severely than those of wood mice? There is much controversy about the value of different Longworth trapping methods in population studies, but using the same techniques over a number of years (as we have on this site) the results must reflect something of the actual situation when used comparatively.

The common shrews made very thorough use of our traps. The contrast between the numbers of wood mice is striking (though we cannot account for recaptures, as we do not mark shrews). The habitat certainly seems to be developing into a shrew's utopia (Brown in Delany 1985), so maybe the result is not so unusual. Or could it be that a small 'trap happy' band enjoyed being fed tempting pupae for the weekend after a hard winter? If so, it is not reflected in previous results.One particularly interesting record, considering the solitary and aggressive nature of these creatures, was the discovery of two shrews in one trap. Both were well and active when released. One must have been in hot pursuit of the other to allow both in the trap at once. Could this be the first breeding record for March for the common shrew? Also very important is, that after capturing a total of 52 shrews over the weekend, we had no fatalities.

The bumper bank vole capture (including 7 recaptures) is perhaps less surprising, bearing in mind their more stable populaton dynamics. After comparison with previous records it is unusual for this site at this time of year. Remarks made about the common shrews and habitat and 'trap happy' syndrome also apply here, substituting 'tempting maize and oats' for 'tempting pupae'!

Field voles and pygmy shrews were again present to give a six species community.

Trapping at this site is always rewarding and, especially after these results, it will be very sad when our project here is finshed. Perhaps the elusive water shrew *(Neomys fodiens)* and yellow necked mouse *(Apodemus flavicollis)* might bring our final trap in September to a stupendous climax!

References:

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