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Mammals

A 1960’s sample of bats in University College Cork’s Zoology Museum

In the 1960’s there was a research interest in bats and their fleas and ticks, at what was then the Department of Zoology, of University College, Cork. The principal researchers were Andre Claassen, Fergus O’Rourke, Fergus O’Gorman, G.A. Walton and Tom Kelly who published many times, mainly on bat fleas (e.g. O’Rourke 1965, O’Gorman and Claassens 1965), but also on bat ticks (O’Gorman 1965a). Their collections of fleas forms the basis for understanding this group for Ireland (Claassens and O’Rourke 1966) and this is especially true for bat fleas (Sleeman and Smiddy 1994).

In October 1986 the author, along with Robert E. Stebbings, of the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology UK, re-examined an undated collection of what was labelled as 21 Daubenton’s Bats Myotis daubentoni (Kuhl, 1819) that were collected in a house roof in west Cork, killed and stored in alcohol. We found that there are actually two species present: made up of 11 Daubenton’s Bats and 9 Natterer’s Bats Myotis nattereri (Kuhl, 1818) they were re-labelled accordingly (Museum reference 01374). The Daubenton’s Bats comprised of three females with a mean forearm length of 36.6mm and six males with a mean forearm length of 38.8mm; one could not be sexed due to decay and one was represented with a mean forearm length of 38.0mm, and five females with a forearm length of 38.6mm. It is clear that the collector(s) missed the fact that the roost had two species and did not identify the Natterer’s Bats. This suggests they were collected in the early 1960s as Fergus O’Gorman recorded a single Natterer’s Bat from Co. Cork in August 1964 (O’Gorman 1965b), and he with Andre Claassens recorded the first two Natterer’s Bats in Co. Kerry around the same time (Claassens and O’Rourke 1966). So by then both knew how to distinguish Natterer’s Bat and they wrote that Natterer’s Bats were “easily recognised by the very white ventral pelage and especially by the fringe of hairs on the interfemoral membrane”. Today we would add that the Daubenton’s Bat has a calcar which extends three quarters of the length of the foot to the tail (Jones and Walsh 2001) and draw attention to the larger feet of Daubenton’s Bat.

These bat species are now known to commonly share roosts (Schober and Grimmerberger 1989, Macdonald and Barrett 1993) and both have been found in buildings in Ireland (Keeley 1999); but they have not been previously reported roosting together indoors in Ireland. It can be concluded that these bats of mixed sex and species were found together in a roof in west Cork sometime before 1964. It ought to be pointed out that taking bats in this way was common at the time, but due to changed attitudes towards wild mammals is now illegal. There is little doubt that some of this change in attitudes goes back to Robert (Bob) Stebbings several visits to Ireland, in the 1980s when he campaigned for bat conservation. If dead bats are found they should never be discarded and locality, date and collector ought to be recorded on the label (Mitchell-Jones and McLeish 2004) and the bat sent to the relevant museum or Bat Conservation Ireland. The biometric data from the bats described here has been passed to Bat Conservation Ireland to assist with their current efforts at describing Irish bats.

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O’Gorman, F. (1965a) Arge vexatoriae (Latreille), a tick previously unrecorded in Ireland. Irish Naturalists’ Journal 15: 19


O’Rourke, E.J. (1964) Ixodopsyllus intermedius (Rothschild) a bat flea new to Co. Cork Irish Naturalists’ Journal 14: 315-316

Records of badgers (Meles meles) in the Comeragh Mountains, Co. Waterford

On 9 October 2011 and again on 3 January 2013, badgers’ tracks were recorded at an altitude of c.650 m in the Comeragh Mountains, nearMahon Falls, Co. Waterford (S 307 086). Two sets of tracks (100 m apart) were also recorded on 8 October 2013 at c.710 m on a ridge south of Knockanaffrin (S 286 149). Also, on 24 March 2012, a badger sett and lattine were recorded near the upland loughs in Commeauf in the Nire valley at an altitude of c.530 m (S 290 097). It was thought that badgers were scarce or absent above 500 m due to a lack of earthworms (Neal and Cheeseman 1996). However, Irish badgers have been previously recorded at 795 m in the Mweelrea Mountains, Co. Mayo (Gaffney and Sleeman 2007). In central Europe, badgers have been previously reported at high altitudes. Boesi and Biancardi (2002) reported on badgers living in mountains in Italy at 570 m. Similarly, Fischer et al. (2005) have documented badgers at an altitude of 900 m in Switzerland.

Possible upland prey might include frogs (Rana temporaria L.) that are present in the Comeraghs, and other potential prey may be small mammals, bird eggs, nestlings, invertebrates and carrion. The generalist feeding behaviour of Irish badgers in lowland agricultural areas has been found to be more similar to that of badgers in Italy and Spain than to the earthworm-dominated diet in Britain (Cleary et al. 2007). These records of badgers in Irish uplands, the first for Co. Waterford, confirm that badgers do occur in mountain habitats here. In light of conservation and economical issues surrounding badgers in Ireland (Byrne et al. 2012), we believe that the upland badger warrants further study including research on their diet.

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