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BATS, BATS, BATS!

In paging through seemingly endless runs of scientific and sometimes not so scientific journals whilst gathering data for a forthcoming tome on the mammals of Yorkshire, the grinding tedium was periodically relieved by the discovery of the odd anecdote which enabled bats to live to their collective name.

For instance, the first record of a whiskered bat in York was unfortunate enough to tangle with the law - receiving fatal injuries from crashing into a policeman's helmet! This, no doubt, constituted a case of assault and bat-ery. It also proved that policemen's helmets are adequate protection against a bat on the head!

A pasture at Masham, North Yorkshire, evidently stocked with bat-hunting cows, was the scene of the next crime. In 1899 a noctule was found 'dung' to death beneath a cow pat - perhaps cows can fly! (what the finder was doing under the same cow-pat still remains a mystery). No doubt due to the unusual circumstances of its demise the bat was acquired by none other than the Royal Scottish Museum, though whether the cow pat was similarly saved for posterity wasn't stated!

With bats being notoriously difficult to study in the field, thwarted and frustrated bat enthusiasts are delighted when the odd publicity seeking bat obligingly gives itself up for examination. After a field meeting at Grassington, held one searing June day in 1891, the 'supreme soviet' of the Yorkshire Naturalist's Union gathered in the shade of a large tree in the grounds of Grassington House for the time honoured ritual of hearing the reports of the days work. It being such a hot day and members feeling correspondingly lethargic, there was precious little of note to report until fortuitously a whiskered bat, which no doubt had swooned from the heat, fell from the trees amongst the thankful experts gathered below.

Discoveries of new county records are important landmarks. The first 'daubenton's bat recorded in Yorkshire was a real fame-craving show off, flying straight into the hands of a startled bunch of Wakefield naturalists on an excursion to Fountains Abby in 1866. The specimen duly made scientific history and was later immortalised in the literature of the Yorkshire Naturalist's Union.

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