

## **ANIMALS IN WARFARE**

What do cats, elephants, camels, dolphins, bees, glow worms and rats have in common? As Paul Freestone of 'Animal Aid' explained to Faringdon Peace Group at their April meeting, they have all been used in warfare. From ancient times till the present day, animals have been invaluable in war for such tasks as transportation, communications, intimidation and detecting mines and explosives. Glow worms provided light in the trenches. Dogs have been used as scouts, sentries, trackers and messengers and in World War 1 (WW1) Sergeant Stubby, America's first war dog, was decorated. Among the 100,000 pigeons used as messengers in WW1, 95% were successful. In WW2 a cat which carried messages between allied and enemy trenches was shot for treason.

But Paul explained that it is horses which have been the most used and abused animals in warfare. Since the invention of the wheel, horses have been used to pull loads as much as eight times their own weight. Eight million horses died in WW1 alone, mostly from exhaustion, disease and exposure, though British horses fared better than most thanks to the 20 horse hospitals. Horse fodder was the largest commodity shipped during the war. It has even been suggested that the Germans lost the war because they ran out of horses. Although motorised transport was increasingly used in WW2, Germany, for example, still used 2.75 million horses, more than in WW1.

The Dicken Medal was established in 1943 to honour animals in warfare, but Paul Freestone believes that all animals are victims of war, not heroes, and have no choice in whether or not they take part. They serve faithfully and either die or are disposed of when they are no longer useful.