



Derbyshire Mammal Group

News

Autumn
2003
(Issue 2)

Editorial

This, the Derbyshire Mammal Group's second newsletter sees the gradual strengthening of the group, in particular its affiliation to the Mammal Society, the launch of its website and its active involvement with the very first dormouse reintroduction in Derbyshire (more inside).

I'm delighted to have received such a wealth of material for this issue. So much so that it runs to eight pages this time. It includes articles on the work of the county's badger groups and on the continuing need to protect bats and their roosts. Also, otters, small mammal trapping and a host of other contributions that I hope you will find interesting and informative. A big thanks to all those who contributed and my apologies if I had to edit your work or leave anything out.

Please do keep sending in your material, perhaps you have participated in mammal watching or recording activities beyond the county borders and would like to share your experiences with the rest of the group.

Steve Docker

Welcome to the Autumn 2003 issue of Derbyshire Mammal Group News

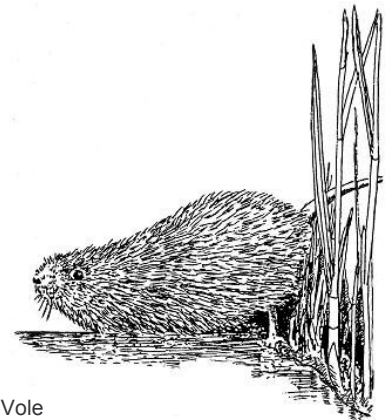
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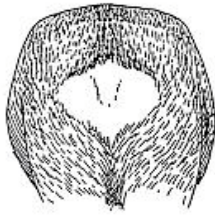
Water Vole Heaven at North Wingfield!

by Helen Perkins

A plan to extend the area of water vole habitat at Derbyshire Wildlife Trust's North Wingfield Nature Reserve has been granted planning permission by North East Derbyshire District Council and work is due to commence this autumn. With funding from the Environment Agency and Biffa, the Trust plans to create a new backwater, restore a former meander of the River Rother and retain the existing straightened section of the river as an additional backwater. The scheme will extend the area of water vole habitat at the reserve by over 80 metres. The stretch of the river that runs through the reserve already supports a good breeding population of water voles, so there is an excellent chance that water voles will colonise the new areas. Monitoring of water voles at the site and long-term sympathetic management by reserves staff and volunteers should ensure that North Wingfield remains a water vole-friendly nature reserve for many years to come.



Water Vole
(DWT)



Roe Deer
(Mammal Society)



Muntjac
(Mammal Society)

Deer Records

by Derek Whiteley

With autumn and winter approaching it is a good time to do some deer recording. We have a good idea of what's going on in the north of the county but no records for the south and centre (not even from deer parks in the south). Accurate species identification is important, but there are plenty of books to help. The Mammal Society chart showing deer backsides is particularly useful, especially when animals are running away from the observer. I have some spare copies left over from the Mammal Society training courses.

Look out for roe deer in the north but especially in the north-east, and maybe right down the eastern side of the county. Muntjac could crop up virtually anywhere but are more likely in the south and east. A few dawn forays along forest rides could pay good dividends.

There are no known sika deer in Derbyshire, but if you want to get some experience of this species I thoroughly recommend Arne RSPB Reserve in Dorset. I spent a memorable morning there watching over forty sika in different groupings in July. Get there early before the punters and you will not be disappointed.

Mammal Society Affiliation

The Derbyshire Mammal Group has now affiliated to the Mammal Society. Benefits include:

- Advice and information through the British mammal enquiry service.
- Access to resources for the study of mammals including the Longworth loan scheme.
- A 33% discount off orders for Mammal Society publications over £20.
- A listing in the "Current Projects on British Mammals" directory.
- County Mammal News, the Mammal Society newsletter for local mammal groups.
- Use of the Mammal Society logo and name to gain support and publicity.
- Inclusion in Mammal Society public liability insurance.

Membership Fees

It was decided at the last meeting of the Derbyshire Mammal Group to introduce an annual membership fee of £5 per household, with effect from January 2004. The funds that this generates will be used for the benefit of the group, help with running costs and build-up a small cash reserve. Requests for payment will be dispatched later in the year.

Anonymous Donor

Members of the DMG would like to thank the anonymous donor who so generously covered this year's subscription to the Mammal Society as well as the cost of the group's website for the next two years.

A History of Dormice in Derbyshire

by Dave Mallon

Dormice were once common in Derbyshire, but declined during the second half of the 19th century and become extinct in the early part of the 20th. In 1789, Pilkington noted that it was scarcely necessary to say that dormice were inhabitants of Derbyshire. An 1862 report said they were formerly abundant, especially in the woods of south Derbyshire, but becoming annually more rare. In the 1905 *Victoria County History*, Jourdain said they were "very numerous in former times, presently very local and scarce except in one or two places". He mentions one caught in Stubbings Wood near Chesterfield in 1774 and lists current localities: Lea Wood (Ladybower), the Lea valley near Cromford, Alderwasley, and High Tor Woods.

There have been no subsequent records. Many volunteers took part in the 1993 Great Nut Hunt, a national dormouse survey organised by the Mammal Society, but no signs were found in Derbyshire or in several other midland counties where dormice had once occurred. A repeat survey in 2002 also produced no records from the county.

These surveys relied on identifying hazelnuts opened by dormice in a characteristic way. This is the standard technique for detecting dormouse presence. Recently however, nestbox evidence has shown that some sites hold dormice even though opened hazelnuts are absent. In fact, the first recent dormouse record in Staffordshire was of an animal found in a tree tube. It is just possible that relict populations survive somewhere in Derbyshire. If you think you know of one, or if you find hazelnuts that you suspect may have been opened by dormice please let the DMG know.

County First - Dormouse Reintroduction

by Tina Wright

Thanks to the Derbyshire Mammal Group for taking on the county's first dormouse reintroduction and to everyone who came at short notice to help put up nestboxes (203 in 2003!). We had less than two weeks notice to organise this and were hoping for what we were told by staff at Royal Holloway, University of London was the minimum number of volunteers necessary – five! I'm sure that all fifteen of us who turned up on the first day appreciate how difficult the job would have been with only five. It took three of us all day to find suitable places and put up the pre-release cages with Fiona Sanderson who brought the boxes and cages from Royal Holloway. However, thanks to Debbie Court spreading the news, we had a good team of hard-working volunteers and managed to get all the nestboxes up before Don MacPherson from Royal Holloway and Nida Al-Fulajij from the Peoples Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) brought the thirty-four dormice. These came in individual nestboxes that were placed directly into the pre-release cages, but Don was good enough to show us all one of the dormice and answer our questions before we set to work.

Help was also plentiful during the ten-day feeding programme prior to release. It took approximately an hour and a half to two hours to visit and change food in all 15 pre-release cages. Diet consisted of sunflower seeds (our dormice prefer the striped), peanuts, apple, grapes (large black seeded have been most popular but hard to find in the shops) and rich tea biscuits, I haven't been buying the low-fat variety! The food containers, large plastic half-bottles that fit into a piece of pipe, were emptied, cleaned and fresh food supplied daily.

We found that the round bottles were best

(obviously) but we were supplied with some square ones and one dormouse managed to squeeze the wrong side of one of these and get stuck. When feeding in the evening nearly all the volunteers saw the dormice out in some of the cages and the animals were unperturbed by our presence.

Release day was the 8th July - only one dormouse was up and waiting that morning but because we didn't want him, or her, to escape too quickly we left that cage until the afternoon. By the 20th July only two of the 15 cages appeared empty and unvisited. The rest had food taken regularly, which was being topped up daily.

On 27th September, the nestboxes inside the pre-release cages plus 202 individual nestboxes were checked by volunteers, Dave Mallon and Steve Docker have licences to carry this out. One nestbox could not be found, neat rows of easy to find boxes were not possible in our wood. The check revealed ten dormice in nestboxes (six original micro-chipped animals, three new animals and one that escaped as the box was being approached). No animals were found to be using the pre-release cages. The average weight of the micro-chipped animals was 20.3g (range 17g to 23g). The new animals had an average weight of 15.7g (range 12.5g to 18.5g). Thirty-four dormice were released in the summer so lets hope that the rest have managed to find themselves natural sites within the wood to construct their nests. A second nestbox check is planned towards the end of October and then another in the spring of next year.

Thanks again to the Derbyshire Mammal Group for supporting this reintroduction so wholeheartedly and for planning the efficient future monitoring. The offer of help with winter management necessary for good dormouse habitat is also very much appreciated.



Dormouse
by Laura Berkeley

Derbyshire's Badger Groups

by Irene Brierton

There are four badger groups in Derbyshire, each covering its own geographical area and dealing with pretty much any and every conceivable issue relating to badgers.

We maintain a close working relationship with the police, RSPCA and Countryside Ranger Service and co-operate fully with one another. The Derbyshire groups are part of a network of eighty-three local voluntary badger groups throughout Britain whose efforts are co-ordinated by the National Federation of Badger Groups (NFBG). The NFBG promotes the conservation, welfare and protection of badgers, their setts and habitats.

All the groups welcome new members and have open meetings to which all are invited. Involvement by any of the Derbyshire Mammal Group members would be particularly appreciated.

One of the more onerous tasks that each of the badger groups has set itself is arranging for the removal and disposal of dead badgers, the vast majority of which are unfortunate road casualty victims. At certain times of the year, those periods of heightened badger activity during peak mating times in early spring and autumn, collection of casualties can be an almost daily task.

If ever you come across a dead or injured badger the local badger group can be contacted via the police or RSPCA if you do not have a direct number available.

The badger groups have certain members who will go out at any time of the day or night, with specialist equipment, to rescue injured badgers. Each has appointed vets who will treat the animal if possible or give euthanasia if necessary. Rehabilitation facilities are available following treatment until the animal can be returned, whence it came, to the wild.

Why do we do this, I hear you ask. Why indeed – I sometimes wonder, but seriously, knowing where badgers get knocked down provides us with a valuable insight into where they are and into their patterns of behaviour. We do lots of other things too. Call us, join us, you may be surprised.



Badger
(DWT)

Licensed to Care

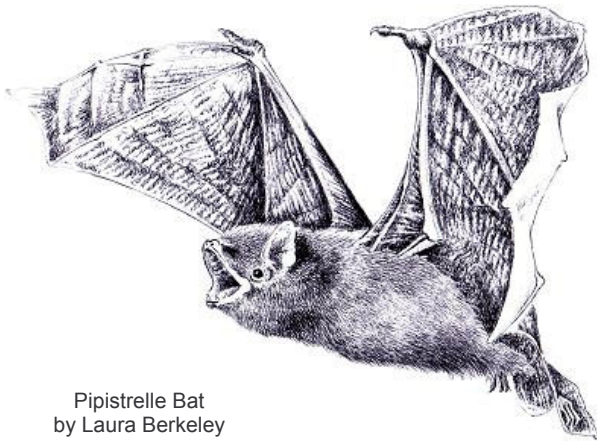
by Sue Crookes

In May 2002 I received my first bat call. An architect on entering a roof had detected bats and wouldn't proceed with the work of installing a Sunpipe – which basically is a prism on the roof with a pipe passing through the roofspace to throw natural light into an area devoid of this. Would I go and have a look? I had received excellent training, now had my batworker's licence and went along to my first 'bat job' with a mixture of emotions.

The owners were very pleasant and after placing a ladder below the loft access for me, I climbed up into the roof space. I had been taught that when removing the loft door, the first place to look for bat droppings is on the surface of the loft door itself. But nothing could have prepared me for what I did see. The floor was thick with bat droppings and appeared in places to be 2" - 3" thick! Picking some up I straight away told the owner that they were from Brown long-eared bats. Flashing my torch up into the roofspace I saw them! The noise had disturbed them and several were flying around. Where the chimney breast was, old mortar had fallen to leave a considerable gap where 30 or so faces looked out at me. The word springing into my mind at that moment was 'WOW'. Not wanting to disturb them anymore I put the loft door back into position and went downstairs with the owner.

Over coffee, I was shown letters from the Nature Conservancy Council (as it was then) which had been sent to the previous owners in the 1980's, pointing out that this was a recognised maternity roost and important for the number of bats which seemed to be breeding there.

At this point, the owner, who had moved in a year ago, said that they had always wanted to live in the countryside, along with all the wildlife and were happy with the bats, apart from the growing accumulation of droppings. Our discussion concluded with the action plan of gathering enough members of the Derbyshire Bat Group to assist in removing the droppings when the bats had left to go to their winter roost. Sheets could then be put in situ and the roost monitored annually for an increase or decrease in the colony and also removal of the droppings. The building work and



Pipistrelle Bat
by Laura Berkeley

installation of the Sunpipe could take place, in the autumn, again when the bats had vacated the premises. Everyone was happy.

There were several calls between the owner and myself in the interim period and in August, I took 3 volunteers with me to carry out an emergence survey. I positioned them all around the house, as I knew several access points were being used. Brown long-eared bats are notorious for coming out after dark and for having very quiet echolocation calls - that is why they are known as the whispering bat. But out they came before dark. And from all 4 sides of the house. It was quite amazing to witness and at the end of the evening 183 bats, of which 70 percent were long eared, - the others being Pipistrelles - were counted out. On the owner's request, in October, I returned to survey the property and told him the bats had now dispersed.

From that moment, I started to feel uneasy with the situation. He didn't want the bat group to assist in the removal of the droppings; they would do it themselves. The architect would be told that the work could begin, but the detail had now been changed. I expressed concern as what was intended now would seriously impede the bats flying area and asked for a meeting with him to discuss the work and how it should be carried out to give least disturbance to the roost.

I heard nothing more from the owners. During December and January I was in telephone contact with the Senior Ecologist who had gradually become more concerned with the case, as letters were being ignored, and it had become clear builders had been called in and the access points blocked up. English Nature was informed of the case and monitoring of the roost at the time of writing is still ongoing.

The reason for this article is to illustrate just how vulnerable bats and their roosts are. The recent case of rabies last year- which was splashed all over the papers - hasn't helped, and with the ruling from English Nature that all volunteer batworkers used by them for roost visits have to be vaccinated against rabies, the bats need all the help they can get.

In Derbyshire, we have just thirteen batworkers licenced to cover the whole county and some have chosen not to have the vaccination, which means more work for those who have.

Anyone who reads DMG News is showing his or her interest for mammals in general.

English Nature would welcome interest from anyone willing to train for a bat licence.

Is that you?



Mammal Records

by Derek Whiteley

I am grateful to all that have sent in records since February. The database is now approaching 2000 records and I am planning to download a batch to the Derbyshire Biological Records Centre at the end of this year.

My thanks go to Debbie Court [49 records] Ian Weatherley [32 records] Shirley Cross [25 records] Dave Mallon [15 records] and Mike Ashford [10 records]. Also to Steve Docker, Sue Crookes, Mike and Jenny Ellis, Dave Richardson, Tony Taylor, Roy Frost, Matthew Capper and Steve Price. Sorry if I forgot anyone - you will get a mention next time. I have been busy too, doing general recording, adding about 600 records to the dataset.

Keep those records coming in. My target is 2500 by Christmas.

Small Mammal Trapping at Woodlands Meadow

by Steve and Liz Lonsdale

On the night of 10-11 May this year the Derbyshire Mammal Group held a small mammal trapping session at Woodlands Meadow in Allestree. The aim was to introduce the techniques for surveying for small mammals using live traps. Small mammals are not often seen, and are generally under-recorded for that reason. Accurate, quantitative and qualitative information is generally only obtained through intensive trapping exercises.

'Small mammal' is generally taken to mean any mammal that will easily fit into a small mammal trap – that is the voles (except water vole), mice, and shrews. Hazel dormice, while small enough, are rarely caught in general-purpose traps.

Both Longworth and Trip-traps were used for the session. Longworth traps are the most common 'live' trap used in Britain for formal studies. The trap consists of two parts; both made from aluminium - a nestbox, which is about the size and shape of a 1-pint milk carton, and a tunnel, with integral treadle and door. The tunnel is attached to the nestbox and held in place under tension but at a slight angle. This allows the tunnel to be placed flat on the ground with the end of the nestbox slightly higher, so that any liquid will drain out and the bedding and animal will remain dry. Although of similar size and design, the Trip-trap is less sophisticated than the Longworth and it is more likely to be damaged by any animal that is caught. In our experience the Trip-trap is less effective than the Longworth, although considerably cheaper.

A small handful of bedding (grass or hay - it is important that it is dry) and food (mixed nuts and seed, e.g. birdseed) were placed in the nestbox of each trap, along with a small amount of blowfly larvae in case shrews were caught. Shrews are very active, and need to eat every three hours or so; if sufficient precautions are not taken they will die if left too long without food. It is illegal to trap for shrews without a licence, and in all trapping exercises precautions should be taken in case shrews are caught.

Traps were numbered for easy identification, and their location noted and marked. In undisturbed areas, locations are usually marked with an obvious sign such as a cane or marked post. Where unwelcome disturbance is likely, more subtle marking is required.

In some areas, a small amount of bait with a strong smell to attract the animals (such as oats and peanut butter) was left near the trap entrance (but see 'Field Voles', below).

The traps were set at 20:00 on the 10th, and inspected at 07:30 the following morning. In hot weather, traps should be visited every 2-3 hours; unless imperative for the success of the survey, traps should not be set in very hot weather, if the temperature is likely to fall below around 5 degrees centigrade, or if the weather is very wet.

The purpose of the session was to catch as many animals as possible, and so traps were left where it was felt that small mammals were likely to come across them (e.g. near food supplies or caches, and beside or in small mammal runs or other likely areas of activity), and in a number of different habitats

(wet areas, under scrub and trees, and in rough grassland).

Where accurate quantitative information is required, it is more effective to site traps in a regular grid, with two or three traps at each grid point, each grid point being around 5m apart in grassland and 10-15m apart in woodland. Quantitative information generally requires a regular trapping regime over a number of nights, repeated at regular intervals through the year.

The traps were opened and emptied into a polythene bag. The trap, bedding, and food etc were removed from the bag, leaving just the animal, which was identified and weighed. The animal was removed from the bag (either by the scruff of the neck or by the base of the tail) and measured, aged, and sexed, and its reproductive condition noted.

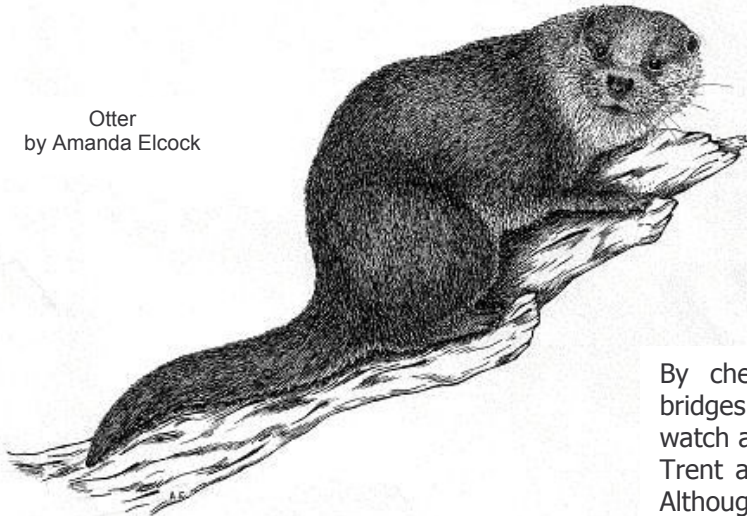
Some animals were also marked by clipping the fur, leaving a dark mark, which is easily visible, but will grow out over a month or two. Use of different marking patterns enables individual animals to be easily identified if re-caught - standard patterns include marks on the shoulder, flank, and buttock, on each side of the animal. Permanent marks (for example ear clipping, removal of one or more joints on the feet, freeze-drying of fur) are either invasive or likely to affect the animal's natural behaviour, and unless necessary to the success of the survey should be avoided. Animals were released at the point of capture, and the bag weighed to enable calculation of the animal's weight.

A total of 79 traps were set (62 Longworth and 17 Trip-trap), resulting in 16 wood mice, 5 bank voles, and 3 common shrews (all in Longworth traps except one of the shrews). The majority of the wood mice were caught in traps set under trees at the edge of the fields; most of the bank voles in hedgerow, and the shrews in damp grassland. It was thought that field voles were also present, but none were trapped. Field voles have a reputation for being 'trap shy', and are rarely caught at the first attempt in a specific location, though if traps are left *in situ* for 2-3 days the success rate rises significantly (Longworth traps have a 'pre-bait' catch which enables the trap to be locked open - traps can therefore be left in place for some time without requiring a visit). In addition, if field voles are the intended targets, it is generally better not to use peanut butter and oats as bait - the strong smell seems to deter the animals. Subsequent trapping sessions at Woodlands Meadow have resulted in field voles and water shrews also being caught.



Wood Mouse
by Laura Berkeley

Otter
by Amanda Elcock



In recent years, much of this increase has been happening here in the heart of the country, as the populations from the Welsh borders expand to meet animals from the reinforced populations of eastern England.

Here in Derbyshire, a dedicated team of volunteers with the Water for Wildlife Project have been monitoring our own expanding otter population for the last three years.

By checking for spraints and tracks under specified bridges across the county's rivers, we've been able to watch as the otter population has become stronger on the Trent and the lower sections of the Derwent and Dove. Although still quite few and far between, it seems that these 'lower Derbyshire' otters are consolidating their range, with signs being found with increasing regularity at their favoured spots. It now seems certain that otters are once again breeding successfully on our lowland rivers, even if we can't be sure exactly where the animals are!

Signs have recently been found on some of the smaller watercourses, with regular animals along both the Hilton and Henmore Brooks. Occasional 'positives' have also come from the Erewash, Amber and Wye and a dead male found just across the Cheshire border last autumn, together with two likely footprints more recently, suggests that there may be otters back on the Goyt catchment.

Unfortunately, the state of play in the north of the county is something of an unknown quantity. During the previous national survey, in 1993, there were a spate of positive signs on the upper Derwent and the Wye. Since then, nothing... Was this just a single transient animal that had recently moved into the area but which was unable to find a mate and moved on again? If so, why have no more followed in his wake? Or maybe there are still otters up there and it's just that our surveying and monitoring work is missing them. It's certainly true that the most regularly checked sites have always been down in the south. In which case, why are we not receiving more sightings from anglers, who are reporting plenty of water voles and mink in the same areas?

Without the time or resources to embark on another full survey of the county, we must rely on our monitoring volunteers to keep an eye on our otters. In the autumn, more monitoring points will be identified and, hopefully, more volunteer otter spotters recruited to increase the number and frequency of sites checked. If you would like to get involved with otter monitoring, or if you have any positive records of otters in and around the county, no matter how old the records are, please contact the Water for Wildlife Project at the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust.

Otters in Derbyshire

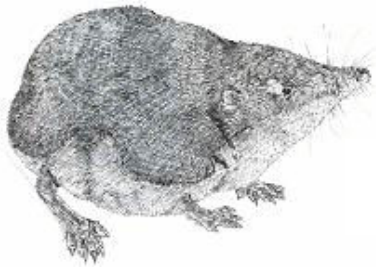
by Philip Precey

Some time around 1970, a Derby vicar watched three otter cubs and their mother playing in the River Derwent at the bottom of his garden, where he regularly found footprints on the muddy banks. It was to be another thirty years before otters would breed in Derbyshire again.

The story of the otter's decline in the UK is a well known one. A background of declining water quality and persecution were already having an effect on otter populations around the country during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Then, in the late 1950s, the introduction of persistent organochlorine pesticides led to a sudden and dramatic crash that continued right through until the end of the 1970s. By the time of the first national survey in 1977-79, otters had disappeared from almost all of England, with the exception of the south west and small remnant populations in East Anglia and the far north east. Large parts of Wales were also otter-less, as well as parts of the Scottish lowlands.

This summer saw the publication of the results of the Fourth Otter Survey of England, carried out by the Wildlife Trusts and the Environment Agency during 2000-02.

The biggest news from this report, based on survey work carried out by The Wildlife Trusts and the Environment Agency between January 2000 and February 2002, was that the national otter population continues to grow. When comparing the original sample of 2940 sites around the country that were first surveyed in 1977-79, there has been an increase of 527% over the last 25 years.



Water Shrew
by Julian Jones

Water Shrews at Chee Dale?

by Helen Perkins

There's a widespread perception that the water shrew may be declining in the UK and recent evidence illustrating the devastating impact of some pesticides on aquatic invertebrates, which form a large part of the water shrew's diet, suggest that current concerns could be well-founded. Discovering more about the distribution and status of the water shrew in Derbyshire is therefore something of a priority and with that in mind, DWT's Water for Wildlife Project recently tried the baited tube method of surveying for water shrews at Chee Dale Nature Reserve. Following guidelines written by Sara Churchfield, who developed the methodology, a handful of blowfly larvae were placed in each of thirty 150 mm long x 40 mm diameter plastic tubes. Bait was held in place by a nylon net fixed to one end of the tube and tubes were fixed to the ground with wire. Tubes were set at intervals along the banks of the River Wye, small sidestreams and in a wetland area away from the watercourse. Data were collected relating to vegetation, water flow and substrate at tube sites. Ten days later five members of the DWT Midweek Volunteers team helped to collect the tubes in the hope that water shrews would have visited some of them and left their mark in the form of scats. Most tubes were taken home for drying, before the contents were sorted, bait fragments discarded and scats stored in pots and labeled. 50% of the tubes contained scats, all of which were shrew-like (black in colour and crumbly in texture). Some of the intact scats measured 6-7 mm, suggesting they were likely to have been left by water shrews rather than the smaller common or pygmy shrews. Many droppings were fragmented, however, and impossible to distinguish by size alone. Scats will now be examined under a x 50 microscope to see if they contain the remains of aquatic invertebrates. The water shrew is the only small mammal to prey on aquatic invertebrates so this is a fairly foolproof way of confirming water shrew presence. We hope to be able to use a refined version of this methodology to survey for water shrews at other sites in the future. Thanks to Dave Mallon for assisting with the preparation and setting of tubes and to Kate, Shirley, Michelle, Ian and Rol for collecting tubes and making suggestions for improving the methodology.

Useful Contacts

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SmartGroups: www.smartgroups.com/groups/derbyshiremammals

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Many thanks to all those who contributed material for this issue and to the Mammal Society, Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, Amanda Elcock, Laura Berkeley and Julian Jones for their excellent illustrations.

Please send material, details of forthcoming events, comments etc to Steve Docker: Tel: 01335 348345 or email: steve@dock5.freemove.co.uk

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