



Derbyshire Mammal Group

News

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The Derbyshire Mammal Group
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Beavers return to Scotland

Dave Mallon

The long delayed project to reintroduce European beavers (*Castor fiber*) to Scotland is at last about to be realised. The trial reintroduction, by the Scottish Wildlife Trust and the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, and supported by Mammals Trust UK, was given formal approval by the Scottish Government's Minister of the Environment in May 2008. Under the scheme, four families of beavers will be collected from Norway in autumn 2008 and released, following quarantine, in spring next year in Knapdale Forest, Argyll. In 5 years, a final decision will be taken on whether to continue the project. Full details are available in the August 2008 edition of *British Wildlife* (vol.19 no.6. pp381-391).



Photo courtesy of the Wildwood Trust

Recorder Update

Debbie Alston

Since my last update in April the mammal records have been coming in thick and fast. The database at the end of August had 28,248 records on it! The coverage of the county has increased with many empty squares filled in by recorder effort. Derek Whitley reported at the end of June that all of the 1 km grid squares north of the grid line 59 had at least one record in them (some of these records are still to be passed on so do not appear on the DMG maps yet).

Records have been received from many DMG members including (in no particular order) David Gravenor, Dave Mallon, Debbie and Dave Alston, Shirley Cross, Marion Bryce, Simon Roddis, Ian Wilbur and Jo Bissell, Steve Docker, Liz and Steve Lonsdale and Rich Bacon and from other county naturalists including Shirley Freeman, Kate and Bryan Barnacle, Loz Brooks, Mike and Jenny Ellis, and Barry Potter.

Following discussions with Nick Moyes at Derby Museum some pre 2000 records were added to the database including more than 3,000 rabbit records! We are hoping to receive more records from Nick soon. Discussions with Derbyshire Wildlife Trust have allowed us to receive more than 2,000 water vole records. These two large influxes of records will explain the top two species in the DMG database. I also added more than 1,000 records from the 1969 publication 'Mammals of the Derby Area'.

Following information from Mike Ashford we are now in discussion with the British Trust for Ornithology to receive their mammal records collected during the BTO Garden Bird Watch. Thanks are also due to Sue Crookes who transferred more than 200 mammal records from a Peak District National Park Authority Rangers logbook. Steve Docker, Liz and Steve Lonsdale, Ian Wilbur and Jo Bissell, with others, have been small mammal trapping over the summer. Some of these sessions have been carried out on farms owned by members of a Countryside Management group in the Bradley area.

The monthly 'square bashing' sessions have also been successful in filling in under-recorded areas. Sessions have taken place in Shipley Country Park, Findern, Willington, Turnditch, Drakelow, Ashbourne area.

The Garden Mammal Survey run in conjunction with the Women's Institute, Ogston Bird Club and the Derbyshire Ornithological Society has been a huge success. Garden Mammal Records have also been collected at various shows including the Ogston Bird Club Open Day, Go Wild In Derby, Froggatt and Grindleford Shows. I have also given talks on the atlas project to a number of different audiences and not let people leave without filling

in a garden mammal survey form! All of this has had a big increase in number of the 'garden mammals' such as fox, hedgehog, grey squirrel and brown rat, especially within the urban and urban fringe areas. I will do an analysis of the garden mammal survey for the next newsletter. One interesting comment that has been made to me, on more than one occasion, is the apparent increase in brown rat sightings, especially in areas, which now have fortnightly bin collections!

Dave and I have continued to update the species maps monthly on the website so you can see the fruits of your labours. There are some squares that only have one species in them, this is especially true of the squares in the north of the dark peak with mountain hare records.

The top 10 mammals recorded on the database are:

Placing	Species	No of records	Percentage of all DMG records
1	Rabbit	4,561	16.15
2	Water Vole	4,352	15.41
3	Mole	3,501	12.39
4	Grey Squirrel	2,574	9.11
5	Brown Hare	1,929	6.83
6	Fox	1,870	6.62
7	Badger	1,704	6.03
8	Hedgehog	1,524	5.40
9	Mountain Hare	888	3.14
10	Field Vole	833	2.95

Please keep the records coming in and let's see if we can break the 30,000 records mark by Christmas!

You can submit records online at www.derbyshiremammalgroup.com, or e-mail to mammalrecorder@derbyshiremammalgroup.com

or post them to 61, Hillside Rise, Belper, Derbyshire, DE56 1NH

Provisional distribution maps for Derbyshire's mammals are updated on a monthly basis and may be viewed on the DMG website:

www.derbyshiremammalgroup.com

DMGTV

Steve Lonsdale

As many of you will know, DMG featured on BBC's 'CountryFile' in September, as part of their ongoing series on the goings-on at Calke Abbey. Bill Cove, the Head Warden at Calke, kindly invited us along to provide some variety from the house-orientated content, and we were keen to accept as we hoped to be able to include a plug for the Mammal Group and the Atlas work we are currently undertaking.

Liz Lonsdale, Shirley Cross, Jo Bissell, Ian Wilbur and I met with Bill the evening before to set 70-odd Longworths in rough grassland / bramble / open woodland. After a fine start we got completely soaked in a couple of very heavy downpours, but by dusk the traps were set, and the peanut butter / oats mixture (used as bait) replenished (as Bill's dog had eaten much of the first lot deposited).

The following morning we had a reasonable catch of 13 Wood Mice, 2 Bank Voles, and a Common Shrew. The BBC were timed to film at 16:30, well before dusk, so while we only expected to have a few animals (mostly voles) in the traps by then, we were fairly confident of success.

Jo, Ian, and I met at 16:00 on a fine evening, to find only 5 of the traps tripped. Once the BBC camera team arrived with Bill, we spent some time on background filming, demonstrating setting the traps etc. Eventually we opened the first trap, to find a young toad, much to the camera team's amusement (and our trepidation – only four traps left!). Fortunately, the second trap contained a Bank Vole, and so we were able to get some reasonable footage. The other three traps contained a slug, and two further Bank Voles.



Photo by Steve Lonsdale

Altogether the BBC filmed for around 90 minutes, during which we mentioned the Atlas and the Mammal Group a number of times, but unfortunately those sections were left on the cutting-room floor. All in all an enjoyable experience – we learnt a lot about how much time goes into making programme content (90 minutes filming resulted in 80 seconds of broadcast material), and the camera team appeared to enjoy filming something different.

A Derbyshire Otter

Steve Docker

In April 2008 a juvenile otter was accidentally caught in a cage trap and released unharmed on the Henmore Brook at Sturston Mill. The animal was caught during the day and measured about 0.55m nose to tail (an adult otter measures about 1m). Interestingly, its feet were almost adult size at approximately 50mm wide (adult 60mm wide). This suggests that caution may be needed when interpreting those footprints in the sand!



Photo by Brian Pegg

Small Mammals at Woodhead Farm

Steve Docker

In May 2008 the DMG demonstrated small mammal trapping to members of the Countryside Management Group. Bank vole, **house mouse** and wood mouse were trapped and released at the 72 acre, organic Woodhead Farm near Ashbourne.



Photo by Liz Lonsdale

Dung Fungi

Dave Mallon

A large group of fungi (coprophagous) depends completely on animal dung, particularly that of herbivores. These specialised and mostly microscopic species are responsible, with other organisms, for the breakdown of dung and have an important role in nutrient recycling.

Many of these species are specific to a single host. One of these is *Coniochaeta polymegasperma* that only occurs on the droppings of the Mountain Hare (*Lepus timidus*). This fungus was first identified in Scotland by Edinburgh-based expert Mike Richardson. He has now identified the first records of this species from England on four samples of mountain hare droppings from the Peak District: three provided by DMG (Mill Hill near Glossop, Far Small Clough Head in Longdendale, and Barrow Stones on Bleaklow) and a fourth from Margery Hill sent in by Val Clinging of Sorby MG. *C. polymegasperma* is also known from the Faroe Islands, but not so far from Scandinavia, so it appears to be geographically localised as well.

Dung fungi often need to pass through the gut before the spores can germinate and they have evolved two ways to maximise the chance of encountering the right host. They discharge spores explosively into the air stream, using photo-sensors to detect when the sun is highest and so warm air is rising, and the spores may have a sticky coat or appendage so that they adhere to vegetation on landing and await ingestion by the target species. The success of this strategy is illustrated by the fact that Mountain Hares have only been present in the Peak District for 120-130 years. Either this species disperses southwards regularly in the air stream from Scotland or the spores remain viable for a long time, scattered across the wider landscape.

Badger Hair Fungi

And whilst we're on the subject of specialised fungi there is even a species *Arthroderma terrestre* that appears to live on the discarded hairs of the European badger (*Meles meles*)! Fresh soil samples taken from active badger holes were used in the study, mainly from South West England but some samples were also provided from Derbyshire. (Ed).

Campbell, C. K. et al, *Arthroderma olidum*, sp. Nov. A new addition to the *Trichophyton terrestre* complex, Medical Mycology, August 2006, 44, 451-459.

Are there wild Pine Martens in Derbyshire and the Peak District?

Dave Mallon

Pine martens (*Martes martes*) had been eliminated from most parts of England and Wales during the 18th and 19th centuries. Relict populations survived for longer in the Lake District and Snowdonia and in a few other localities in Northern England. There were confirmed records from the Yorkshire sector of the Peak District, close to the Derbyshire border, as recently as 1926 and 1931, when a young female was caught near Bolsterstone, and is now in Sheffield Museum (Howes 1985).

Sporadic reports of pine martens on both sides of the county boundary in the Upper Derwent Valley and adjacent woodlands continued into the 1980s but were never confirmed by a photograph or a corpse. Thorough searches of the area in the mid-1980s for marten scats, using a technique pioneered in Scotland (Velandar 1983) failed to produce any positive results, though the reliability of this method has since been questioned.



Photo courtesy of the
Vincent Wildlife Trust

The Vincent Wildlife Trust later began a nation-wide effort to record pine marten presence in England and Wales, interviewing observers where possible and assigning each sighting a confidence score on a scale of 1-10. Between 1994 and 2003 they collected 20 reported pine marten sightings in Derbyshire that featured a confidence score of 6 or more. One of these was from the vicinity of Derwent Reservoir, in the Upper Derwent Valley. Twelve sightings came from the Crich-Holloway-Matlock area, notably a cluster of 10 during 1996-1997, with one in 1999 and another in 2003. There was one sighting in the Goyt Valley in 1998, not so far from Rainow, Cheshire, also in the NW Peak District, where a pine marten was reported in March 1992. The other six Derbyshire records were from widely scattered localities: Milldale, Breadsall, Chellaston, Bradbourne, Holymoorside and Stanton Moor.

The Milldale record was supposedly an animal dead on the road, but the body was not collected. The other sightings are all unconfirmed; again no photograph or corpse available. The best of the recent records rated 9/10 on the VWT confidence scale and concerned an animal seen in January 1997 in a tree in a Crich garden, watched through binoculars for 20 minutes at a distance of 40 yards. Three weeks later, the same observers enjoyed a second garden sighting, presumably the same animal, this time feeding on hawthorn berries. Another report referred to an animal seen several times foraging round dustbins at dawn and dusk on a caravan site near Matlock.

The Crich animal was by all accounts a genuine pine marten and other recent reports also seem quite authentic, but some sightings were brief – only a couple of seconds in one case – or referred to animals seen on the road at night. In the absence of corroborative evidence and especially with fleeting sightings, there is always the possibility of misidentification or confusion, especially with stoats, which do climb trees and have been observed as high as 40 feet up a larch on one occasion in the county.

There were two confirmed pine marten records in Staffordshire in 2004 (Crawley et al 2007). One was photographed in a tree at Consall in the Churnet Valley, not far from the SW boundary of Derbyshire. A sighting on the Leek Moors was subsequently confirmed by DNA analysis of a scat. The latter site is only about 10km south of the Goyt Valley.

VWT analysed all pine marten sightings in England and Wales between 1996 and 2003 that had a score of 6 or more. The resulting map was acknowledged to be a rather simplified representation of pine marten distribution, but nevertheless showed six main concentrations of martens, one of them in Derbyshire, though centred on the mid-Derwent Valley, not the Peak District.

The first question concerns the origin of any genuine martens. The three obvious possibilities are (a) they represent small relict populations; (b) they are animals dispersing south as Scottish populations expand; and (c) they result from escapes or even unofficial releases. The only realistic possibility of long-term survival would be the Upper Derwent and adjoining woods of the Peak District. However, reports from these areas seem to have dried up. Furthermore, the whole area is well kept and potential predators of red grouse are heavily controlled, so any surviving pine marten would have to be extremely cunning as well as lucky to avoid being accidentally shot or caught in traps set for foxes and stoats.

It would stretch belief too far to suggest that a small population of martens might have somehow survived and been overlooked for more than 100 years in the woods of the mid-Derwent, especially in view of the fact that some of these woods have been cleared and replanted during that period. The sudden flurry of sightings in this area in 1996-97 is consistent with either escapes or the arrival of dispersing animals. If such

movements from Scotland take place on a regular basis, it is curious that so far none has been found killed on the Pennine roads (compare the number and radiating pattern of road-killed polecats found since they began to extend their range in England). It is also perhaps unexpected for wild animals that have traversed 300km of wild Pennine terrain to suddenly appear in a garden and this factor, too, may indicate captive origin (although pine martens are commonly seen on garden bird tables and feeding stations in Scotland). Several local naturalists have suggested the martens kept at the former wildlife park at Riber Castle near Matlock as a possible source of the local marten sightings, though the managers of the collection at the time deny losing any animals.

The second question is: are there currently any pine martens in Derbyshire and if so, what is their status? Like most small wild carnivores, martens are rarely observed and difficult to detect through field signs, especially when living at low densities. Several recent research studies have shown that identifying carnivores by visual diagnosis of scats is unreliable, even by experts, and DNA analysis is the only way to confirm the species. This technique is being used by VWT on a new survey of pine marten presence in England and Wales. This survey is due to reach Derbyshire in 2009, and should provide answers to the above questions. In the interim, please report any possible Pine Marten sightings to DMG and Vincent Wildlife Trust (Tel: 01531-636441 email: vwt@vwt.org.uk).

References

- Crawley, D. et al. 2007. *The Mammals of Staffordshire*. Staffordshire Mammal Group, Stafford.
- Howes, C.A. 1985. Pine marten. Pp.145 in M.J. Delany, ed. *Yorkshire Mammals*. University of Bradford, Bradford.
- Velander, K.A. 1983. *Pine marten survey of Scotland, England and Wales 1980-82*. The Vincent Wildlife Trust, London.



Photo by Steve Docker

All at Sea!

Debbie and Dave Alston

Twelve members of the Derbyshire Mammal Group, plus friends, went on a Whale and Dolphin themed mini-cruise in July 2008. The trip was on the Pride of Bilbao which sails between Portsmouth and Santurtzi near Bilbao in Spain. P & O Ferries run a number of these mini-cruises each year in conjunction with the Biscay Dolphin Research Programme (BDRP). Dave and I enjoyed the trip last September so much that we organised a DMG trip to re-live the experience.

The trip was fantastic and according to the BDRP was a record equalling trip where we saw 13 different cetacean species! The conditions were perfect, clear skies, which gave excellent visibility, and a very calm sea. P & O have a Wildlife Officer on all of their ferries, as the ship is used to carry out research on cetaceans in the Bay of Biscay and English Channel, and all sightings are logged for research purposes. On the themed mini-cruises they have a whole army of additional BDRP volunteers who are all very keen eyed and help everyone get to see the whales and dolphins.

We boarded the Pride of Bilbao in the evening of the first day and after checking into the compact and bijou berths we set sail. It was beginning to go dark as we passed the Victory and then out into Portsmouth harbour, around the Isle of Wight and out into the English Channel. Before retiring for the night the BDRP gave everyone on the themed mini-cruise an introductory talk explaining how the cruise would run and how the intriguingly named 'Monkey Island' worked.

Next morning, we were given an illustrated talk telling us about the cetaceans and birds we may see throughout the cruise. They carefully explained that there would be no guarantee of actually seeing anything, of course. We were told the art of cetacean identification is all about the shape, size and position of the dorsal fin, the behaviour of the animal, the angle of the 'blow' from some whale species and the depth of water. Following the talk we all assembled, with the other mini-cruise passengers, on the top deck to start whale and dolphin watching. DMG members had been warned to be prepared with provisions so that they did not have to leave the top deck too many times. It became a bit of a standing joke to rib anyone who had gone down below for a drink or loo visit about the large number of things they had missed! It was not long before shouts went up from BDRP volunteers about the first cetaceans seen. We were told that the direction of sightings was announced according to the clock. Directly in front of the ship was 12 o'clock, behind the stern was 6 o'clock and so on. Of course as the ship kept moving the direction changed and something that was once 1 o'clock, became 3 o'clock and the closer to the ship the cetacean was, the faster it changed.

People were scattered all over the top deck and it was not long before cetacean sightings got people running from one side of the boat to the other, (or port to starboard). Early sightings included Minke Whale and Harbour Porpoise.

The mini-cruise passengers were each allocated a coloured group. Over the course of the cruise each group had two hours on 'Monkey Island'. DMG members were all in one group and were allocated the second 2 hour slot. Monkey Island is the name given to the deck above the bridge. From up there you had a 360 degree view and more importantly directly in front of the ship. The two hours we spent on Monkey Island was one of the best any of the BDRP volunteers could ever remember.



DMG members on Monkey Island
Courtesy of the BDRP

Just before we went up to Monkey Island the ship passed over the edge of the Continental Shelf and over a relatively short distance the sea depth changed from 110 metres to over 800 metres. Rich in nutrients, the shelf provides a favourable environment for fish and other marine animals that cetaceans prey on. After five minutes on Monkey Island, we suddenly came into the middle of a super pod of dolphins, a mixture of common, bottlenose and striped dolphins and there were so many sightings it was difficult to know where to look! Being at the front of the ship we were treated to some spectacular 'bow-riding' from the common dolphins in particular.



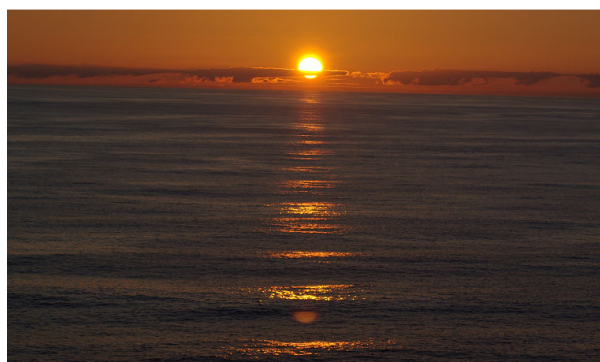
Common dolphin
Courtesy of the BDRP

After our very memorable time on Monkey Island, we were treated to excellent views of Fin whales, Risso's dolphin, and a close encounter with a Cuvier's Beaked Whale right next to the ship. Most of the group were so fascinated by the sightings that they stayed up on deck to watch the sun go down, and of course watch more whales and dolphins! Those who did were rewarded with another hour on 'Monkey Island'.



Cuviers beaked whale
Courtesy of the BDRP

Back on board the Pride of Bilbao cetaceans were seen almost before we left the harbour. Here we passed over the deep waters of the Cap Breton Canyons with more sightings of Fin Whales and dolphins. Most DMG members stayed on deck with the BDRP volunteers looking for Fin Whale 'blows' and more dolphins. Again we were rewarded with another hour on 'Monkey Island' and were allowed to stay up there to watch the sunset far on the horizon.



End of the day
Courtesy of the BDRP

On the last morning we were given, in another illustrated talk, a summary of all that we had seen – listed below:

Harbour porpoise – 3 (in English Channel)

Common Dolphin – 1,141
Bottlenose Dolphin – 146
Striped Dolphin – 437
Risso's Dolphin – 2

Long-finned Pilot Whale – 49
Minke Whale – 2 (near Brittany)
Cuvier's Beaked Whale – 9
Fin Whale - 19
Northern bottle-nosed whale
Melon-headed or pygmy killer whale – 1 (identification uncertain even by an expert)
Sperm Whale – 1 (spotted by a passenger)
Other cetaceans not identified – 357
Ocean sunfish – 11

Birds seen at sea included many Gannets with a few Cory's Shearwaters and great Skuas. There were also at least two battered looking racing pigeons that hitched a lift on the ship.

All in all it was an excellent trip with many wonderful memories. John and Marion won the raffle for another trip and John Bland composed an appropriate poem, which he read to all the mini-cruise participants.

For more information on the BDRP and mini-cruises visit their website at <http://www.biscay-dolphin.org.uk>.

Many thanks to Debbie and Dave for organising an excellent trip.

My Whale by John Bland (with apologies to Francis Albert)

Egret's, I'd had a few,
But birds did not relieve my tension.
I did what I had to do
And came on board with apprehension.
They'd planned a charted course,
A careful route across through Biscay,
So I could just relax
And sip my whisky.

What could we see, what had we got,
Sometimes a fin, but mostly not.
We stared for hours across the sea.
What was that splash, what could it be?
And through the times when there was nowt
I manned the rail and sat it out.
My record shows
I saw the blows
And spotted my whale.

(PS Best read to the tune of 'My way' by Frank Sinatra)

Right Place, Right Time

Jo Bissell

Day 1 – March 19th 2008

Arrived in Madrid to beautiful sunshine and 17°C. From Madrid we headed south to Andujar. The further south we headed the cloudier the weather turned and by the time we arrived at our destination the rain had started.

The main reason we were in this part of Spain – Iberian Lynx. Iberian Lynx are the most endangered big cat in the world and the chances of seeing one was slim. Shirley, however, had guaranteed that we would see Lynx and Wolves on this trip – she wouldn't lie to us would she!!!

So undeterred the intrepid travelers – Mike and Shirley Cross, Rich Bacon, Ian and myself – with our guide for the trip, set off to one of the viewpoints in this area. There was only one other there, a local, who had been scanning the area for the Iberian Lynx since 7.00 am that day – it was now 19.30 – and he had not seen any glimpse of the cat in question. Patience was going to be the key, so half an hour later there we all were gazing at an Iberian Lynx cleaning itself! You see Shirley was right.

Back to base for something to eat and a few hours sleep.

Day 2 – March 20th 2008

Up at 6.00am and greeted with a wet morning, and a visit back to the viewpoint to try and get another glimpse of the Iberian lynx. OK maybe a bit too much to ask. We had sightings of Wild Boar, and the Hoopoe kept our interest.

Back to base for a much needed breakfast.

Then out for a drive to a reservoir – sorry don't know the name! Good views along the way of Eagles, both Imperial and Golden, Vultures, both Gryffon and Black and many swallows and martins. The sun now came out to greet us along with the butterflies.

Headed back to base for a short siesta – some would say too short – but the excitement of the possibility of seeing the Lynx again got us all back up and out to the viewpoint.

Obviously the word had got out that DMG were in the area as many more local people were there on this evening. No Lynx though but views of Red and Fallow deer.

A zap back to the base for a food stop and then out for a night drive. Unfortunately not much going on but some glimpses of the domestic dogs and cats kept our hopes alive. This did eventually pay off with some good views of deer.

Back to base at Midnight for some well earned rest.

Day 3 – March 21st 2008

Day 3 already, and up at 6am – are you starting to see a pattern to this? Final day in this area so last chances to see the Lynx. Off to the view point – no rain this morning but quite misty. No Lynx either, however, we did manage to see glimpses of otters- fantastic.

Back for breakfast, and then out again. Today's bird of note, short toed eagle.

Siesta

Then to the viewpoint for the last time. Otters still around and terrapins made an appearance.

Back for evening meal and an earlier night than previously as moving on to the next destination tomorrow and sleep is required.

Day 4 – March 22nd 2008

Up and straight into the vehicle for the journey north. We are moving back up and past Madrid and onto the north west of Spain to Zamora. Stopped at Villafavilla on the way where we saw both Great and Little Bustards and there were plenty of them to see (approx 220) (it's raining again by the way!). Red and black Kites, Harrier, Stork and stilts. Then on to the hotel. We had been journeying all day but on arrival at the hotel we dropped off the bags and headed out to what is now our wolf spotting viewpoint!!

So we stood with a number of other ~~nutters~~ enthusiasts waiting and watching for Wolves, because as we've said, Shirley promised that we would see them.

The temperature was dropping, and with the wind chill factor, it must have been about -4°C. Then to shatter the icicles, there it was, at 19.45, as large as life – well it was actually a fairly small but recognisable dot in a huge landscape – a Wolf.

Day 5 – March 23rd 2008

Surprise, surprise up at 6am! Out for a bit of Wolf spotting. The first Roe deer of the week was seen, although initially it was disguised as a wolf (it was all just to add to the excitement, a ploy to try and keep us awake). However, a Wolf did show itself albeit briefly.

Certainly the pressure was off, we had seen what we had traveled there to see, so back for breakfast and then on for a drive around the area.

Out in the evening but Red Deer and Wild Boar were the only mammals tonight.

Day 6 – March 24th 2008

Final morning and we are all packed and ready for the trip back to the airport.

On the way back stopped at Villafavilla again this time the Lesser Kestrel s had arrived in the area. That was amazing as when we had stopped just a couple of days before there were none to be seen. As always with nature, you just need to be in the right place at the right time!!

Items to note-

The oranges were really tasty.

There should have been a warning stating sleep deprivation was part of the trip.

A big thank-you to our guide – he made Shirley's promises come true!!

A special thank-you to Shirley for arranging it.

And a personal thank-you to all those in the party, for putting up with me as I had a cold, which unfortunately had a very irritating cough to go with it.

Summary

We had in excess of 100 bird species, 11 mammals, 8 butterflies and terrapin.

More Lynx to Scotland?

Dave Mallon

In a forthcoming paper in *Mammal Review*, Dr David Hetherington of the University of Aberdeen and colleagues present the results of an analysis of potential lynx habitat in Scotland. They conclude that there is about 15,000 sq km of lynx habitat in the Highlands, with a further 5,000 sq km in the Southern Uplands connected to about 800 sq km in England, centred on Kielder Forest. Based on prey availability, they also estimate that the Highlands could support a population of about 400 lynx and the Southern Uplands about 50. This would represent the fourth largest lynx population in Europe, based on current figures.

The Realm of the Finnish Bear

Shirley Cross

Unbelievable!! When Mike and I planned this trip we thought we might be lucky enough to see one or two brown bears. So we got up at 02.30 to catch the 07.30 flight from Manchester to Helsinki onward flight to Oulu and 4 hour coach ride to Pirttvaara, arriving in time for dinner at 20.00 local time. Just time for a walk to the end of the road less than 2km from the Russian border and off to bed in the brand new accommodation block.

The next morning we saw red squirrels on the bird table and one of the commonest birds, pied flycatcher. Our guide took us on a tour of the local forest and lakes, lots of birds and a musk rat lodge? Like a small beaver lodge and eventually the animal itself eating roots. Back for a snack and short siesta before dinner at 15.00 and depart for the bear hide at 16.00. It takes a 10 min car ride and 30 min walk to get to the hide. We are met there by Jarkki on the quad bike putting out food for the bears, dog biscuits scattered around and filleted salmon i.e. the heads, backbone and tails.

The hide is fitted with car seats and bunk beds, a composting loo, table and heater. This was to be our home for the next 14 hours (never has time gone so fast). Less than 10 minutes and the first bear arrived, a 2 year old who entertained us eating the biscuits in every pose he could think of. A little later the lovers arrived, well, a female and the male who had been following her for 2 weeks. Was she just playing him along till someone better turned up? Throughout the night bears came and went, there was one stretch of 30 minutes with no bear in sight but mostly they kept us entertained playing, eating and chasing the baby (a yearling we called Rambo) up the trees. A large male came and most of the others went while he had his share of the salmon. They all ate very delicately, peeling off the skin and eating the remaining flesh not just crunching the bones as you might expect. After just 2 hours sleep it was time to

leave, back for an 8 o'clock breakfast. Far too excited to sleep we went on a second tour of the forest before lunch and a one hour siesta and depart for our second night in the hide at 16.00.



Photo by Shirley Cross

Two of the other hides, down by the marsh, had been occupied on the first night and these people reported seeing a mother and 3 young cubs so we were hoping they might visit us tonight. A few minutes after we sat Rambo arrived with his mother, the female half of the lovers; she was still trying to send Rambo away but he still wanted his mum. At 17.30 Anna and the 3 cubs were spotted walking up the hill, they came very slowly and warily checking for other bears. At 17.40 there were three little 4 month old cubs each the size of mums paw. It is quite unusual for such small cubs to be brought to the feeding site, but Anna is an aggressive mother and even the males kept out of her way. They stayed for 15 minutes and the little ones tasted the salmon while mum had something to eat. Other bears came and went and I dozed on a bunk for a couple of hours. Through the haze I heard the cubs were back. Looking out I saw Anna and cubs and at least 6 other bears. After a few chases the little ones went up a spruce tree, at least 40 feet to the very thinnest branches, so Anna could eat as much as possible. I left them there for 3 hours sleep.



Photo by
Shirley Cross

So a quick recap, on the first night we saw at least 11 bears and the second at least 13 bears. On the trip 5 other mammals and 84 bird species. We stayed in Vaara for an extra night to see Great grey owl and Ural owl. An excellent 5 days but, do go early, the mosquitoes were just starting to bite!!

Welsh Mammal Conference 4th – 5th July 2008

Beverley Lambie

Alan, his brother Brian and I attended the Welsh Mammal Conference at the beginning of July. We had been looking forward to this event after the success of the Cheshire Mammal Symposium last year and the Derbyshire Mammal Symposium the year before and the fact that Alan's brother had just moved down the coast from Aberystwyth so we could combine the conference with a visit. We had high expectations and were not disappointed.

On the Friday morning Kate Williamson warmly welcomed everyone to the conference, held at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, in buildings overlooking the town and the sea. Over 100 people attended the event during the two days, mostly from Wales and the West of England. The sessions kicked off with an amusing and informative introduction from Lolo Williams and continued with a session on the National Polecat survey results given by Johnny Birks. Results show that Wales has 95% true polecats with seven English midland counties supporting polecat populations as pure as those in Wales. Like its avian counterparts the red kite and buzzard, the polecat is clearly thriving in our modern lowland landscapes.

The last session before lunch was the conference keynote lecture given by Derek Yalden, speaking on 'Badgers and the TB Issue'. The conference coincided with an announcement that the government would not be supporting mass culling of badgers, as called for by many farmers. Derek pointed out that the experimental culls that have already taken place have emphasised how few badgers carry TB. He suggested that the real problems lie with cattle, cattle farming and imperfect or lapsed testing. TB in cattle is costing taxpayers close to £90m p.a. and rising. However, there is no real evidence that a mass cull of badgers would do anything to eradicate TB in cattle and the cost of such a cull would also be enormous.

After lunch Emma Hare continued with a lecture on 'Island Vole Genetics', looking in particular at bank voles on Anglesey, Ramsey and Skomer. Only Skomer voles exhibit characteristics of 'island syndrome' which includes increased average body size. Dan Forman then gave an interesting talk on 'Water Vole Conservation and Development', focusing on a 'scruffy brown-field' site allocated for future development at Berwig, Llanwelli. Dan commented that sites such as Berwig provide a useful habitat for all kinds of mammals, insects and flowers. The next talk was given by Peter Turner from the Waterford Institute in Ireland on 'DNA Analysis in Pine Martens'. Studies have shown that identification of scats using mitochondrial DNA has allowed surveys to include areas of low population density.

The next session on 'Otter Genetics in the UK' was rather 'academic' in content. Using tissues collected from over 500 otters found dead on road in Wales and England the study hoped to show genetic diversity in re-colonising otters and to highlight bottlenecks in their dispersal. We found the

following talk on the 'Planning Process and Bats' fascinating. It was commented that good planning practice is to consider if there is good information available and if so how can harm to wildlife of all kinds be avoided. A right approach should lead to the correct planning decision being taken. During this talk attention was drawn to threats to wildlife of all kinds that may arise from the new online planning application procedure (IAPP), which aims to dramatically speed up the planning application process. Hardly anyone had heard about the IAPP system before the conference. The first day ended with a lecture on 'Mammals and the Law' given by Jean Matthews which provided a summary of the UK and European legislation relating to wild mammals in Wales.

Day two of the Conference started bright and early with a talk on a pilot study for a National Small Mammal Monitoring Scheme. The aim of the pilot study was to trial five different field methods to cover a range of species and habitats with the aim of developing a sampling strategy and field methodology using non-expert volunteers, suitable for roll-out to a full national scheme by winter 2008/09. A full report on the pilot is now available on the Mammal Society web site. The next speaker was John Messenger talking about 'Pine Marten Scat Hunting Techniques', followed by Liz Chadwick talking about the 'Cardiff University Otter Project – Making the Best of Road Kill'. It was fascinating how much information could be gathered from post mortem examinations of otters found dead in the UK. 127 animals have been examined so far this year. After the coffee break Keith Seamen talked about the development of a new trapping protocol for locating and confirming the presence of Harvest mice. There had been concern that standard small mammal trapping techniques (Longworth trapping and nest searching) were unreliable when applied to harvest mice. Studies have shown that fenlands followed by reed marsh support the highest density of Harvest mice.

Other sessions of interest included a talk on the interaction between Hedgehogs and Badgers and the British Divers Marine Life Rescue on what to do and what not to do if you come across a marine mammal stranded. A talk on the return of red squirrels to the island of Anglesey and the attempts to keep out the grey was followed by the monitoring and assessment of water vole local and regional key areas in Wales. An assessment of Dormice and rare Bats in North Wales were the final two talks.

Overall the presentations given at the conference were all very interesting and informative and the venue excellent. We were impressed by the Arts Centre on the campus and enjoyed both an art exhibition and photographic exhibition that happened to be taking place at the same time as the conference. On the Sunday we watched Dolphins swimming in the harbour at New Quay which made a spectacular end to a great weekend in Wales.

Hopefully the next conference/symposium will be closer to home.

RED SQUIRREL BABIES - First brood of the year

Wildwood e-news July 2008. Text reproduced with permission, courtesy of the Wildwood Trust.

Visitors to Wildwood in Kent are in luck this week with the first sightings of our beautiful red squirrel youngsters.

These new babies, Wildwood's first brood this year, will become part of a ground breaking project to re-introduce red squirrels to the Island of Anglesey and help prevent the nationwide extinction of the red squirrel.

Visitors can see the young red squirrels over the next few weeks, but are advised to come promptly at 10.00am as squirrels like a long nap during lunchtime, especially during sunny weather.

The new squirrel babies, once grown up will be transported to the Welsh island of Anglesey to live wild and free, helping form a buffer population and safeguard the species against national extinction.

Red squirrels went extinct in Kent in the 1960's and many of us can remember them from our childhood. How easy it is for people to forget that Kent once teemed with these beautiful acrobats of the trees.



Photo courtesy
of the
Wildwood Trust

RED SQUIRREL FACTS

The Red Squirrel - *Sciurus vulgaris*

Recognition:

Fur colour variable from bright ginger through to red and dark brown or black tinged with grey in winter; larger ear tufts in mid-winter which disappear by the summer; bushy tail which bleaches white by late summer in some individuals.

Head/body length 180-240mm, tail about 175mm.

Weight: juveniles 100-150g; adults up to 350g.

General Ecology:

This is the only squirrel that is native to Britain. It is active during the daytime, though in summer it may rest for an hour or two around mid-day. Squirrel nests, or dreys, are constructed of twigs in a tree fork, or hollow or above a whorl of branches close to the stem of a conifer. They are lined with soft hair, moss and dried grass. Several squirrels may share the same drey, or use the same drey on different days.

Red squirrels spend about three-quarters of their active time above ground in trees and shrubs. Their main foods are tree seeds, such as hazel nuts and seeds from conifer cones. They also eat tree flowers and shoots, mushrooms and fungi from under tree bark. Red squirrels often suffer periods of food shortage especially during July. Red squirrels are at home in conifer forests and broadleaved woodland. The distribution of red squirrels has declined drastically in the last 60 years and they are now extinct in southern England except for a few on the Isle of Wight and two small islands in Poole Harbour. Elsewhere they are confined to rather isolated populations in Wales and to only four places in central England: Thetford Chase (East Anglia), Cannock Chase (Staffordshire), Hope Forest (Derbyshire) and around Formby in Merseyside. Red squirrels are still widespread in the North of England and Scotland, but even here their range is contracting.

Breeding can begin in mid-winter and continue through the summer, depending on the weather and how much food is available. Mating chases occur where several males follow a female who is ready to mate. During chases squirrels make spectacular leaps through the tree canopy and spiral up and down tree trunks. Females have one or two litters a year, usually of about 2-3 young. Juveniles are weaned at around 10 weeks, but do not breed until they are one year old. Red squirrels in favourable habitat can live at a population density of one squirrel per hectare of woodland. Often densities are lower than this. They survive for up to six years in the wild.

Conservation:

Red squirrels are protected by law, and may not be intentionally trapped, killed or kept, or have their dreys disturbed except under licence from Natural England (NE), the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) or Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

Red squirrels are considered vulnerable in Britain. However, very occasionally high densities in some Scottish forests can lead to economic damage to trees. In such cases, government agencies will assess whether to issue a licence to remove some of the red squirrels.

Breeding Bird Survey 2007

The British Trust for Ornithology BBS 2007 (Report 13) includes information regarding mammal monitoring (p17). Mammal records were received from 2,826 squares, 78% of the total surveyed. The report states that the most species-rich square was in **Derbyshire**, in which 15 mammal species were recorded. Was this one of us? (Ed.)

The "Redwing" Quiz

A written quiz sheet is on sale raising funds for the Derby Local Group of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. It features a mix of cryptic clues and puzzles with the theme of "colours and birds".

The closing date for entries is Saturday 10th January 2009. To obtain a copy send a SAE and cheque for £1, payable to RSPB, to 12 Chertsey Road, Mickleover, Derby DE3 0RA.

Badger Lunar-related Reproductive Behaviour

Cyclicality in behaviours, including reproduction, in relation to the lunar cycle is widely documented in some phyla, but weak or unknown in Class Mammalia. In this paper we present long-term video surveillance data of wild Eurasian badgers *Meles meles*, which reveal a strong correlation between reproductive behaviour and the lunar cycle. Squat marking and raises-leg urination, which increase in frequency at times of reproductive activity, showed maxima around day 22 of the lunar cycle (i.e. new moon). These findings were supported by observations of matings, together with published records, which showed significantly higher occurrence in the lunar dark phase (last quarter to first quarter). We propose that the lunar cycle has the potential to act as a regulator of the reproductive cycle in the badger.

Abstract from the following paper: Dixon, D. R. *et al*, *Lunar-related reproductive behaviour in the badger (Meles meles)*, *Acta Ethol* (2006) 9: 59-63.

**A colour copy of this newsletter may be
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www.derbyshiremammalgroup.com**

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Please send material, details of forthcoming events, comments etc to Steve Docker: Tel: 01335 345253 or email: steve@busypeople.force9.co.uk

Whilst every effort is made to ensure that material is factually correct opinions expressed are those of individual authors and may not represent the views of the Derbyshire Mammal Group.