



Derbyshire Mammal Group

News

Spring
2003
(Issue 1)

Editorial

Following the inaugural meeting of the group at the Whistlestop Centre, Matlock Bath on Thursday 16th January 2003 and its first event, the harvest mouse day at Erewash Meadows on Sunday 16th February 2003 (more later), the Derbyshire Mammal Group can now be considered "up and running".

The initial aim of its newsletter, "Derbyshire Mammal Group News" is to provide the group with a means to share useful information about all things to do with wild mammals with particular emphasis upon the county of Derbyshire.

The initial response to my call for material has been excellent and I've had a very difficult editing job to keep the number of words to a manageable level !

Many thanks to all those who contributed and apologies if I have had to edit or omit your work this time around. Please do keep sending in your material so that we can all share in your mammal experiences.

Steve Docker

Welcome to the Spring 2003 issue of Derbyshire Mammal Group News

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Mountain Hares

by Dave Mallon

The mountain hares of the Peak District are beginning to moult back into their brown summer coat now, but this is still a good time to go and see them as there should be enough white left in the coat to make them conspicuous. This is especially the case in late afternoon and evening on sunny days when the slanting rays of the sun pick them out a considerable distance away. Good sites are Derwent Edge above the eastside of Ladybower and Derwent Reservoirs and Crowden Valley in Longdendale.

They can still be distinguished from brown hares later in the year: the all white upper surface to the tail is diagnostic (the brown hare has a black centre to its tail). Other distinguishing features are the shorter, more rounded ears, darker, greyer brown coat (not tawny or yellow brown) and slightly smaller size.

Mountain hare distribution in the Peak District covers most of the Dark Peak from Wessenden Moor south to Kinder, and across Langsett and the Derwent Moors down to Houndkirk Moor. A survey in 2000 organised by the DWT and in conjunction with the Peak Park and National Trust's High Peak Estate found them present in 332 1-km squares, a 35% increase in range since 1984. Numbers also showed an increase. Subsequent work by Derek Yalden and Phil Wheeler of Manchester University indicates that the population is much higher.

The population appears to have been expanding from a low point following the 1962-63 winter and it will be interesting to see if they continue to expand in the NW of the Peak District where density is currently low. Another area to monitor lies on the eastern moors. Their present distribution extends to the north side of the A625 and there are only rare, isolated records to the south, where around 30 sq km of moorland from Totley Moss and Big Moor south to Beeley Moor are currently unoccupied and potentially available for expansion.

A recent paper in Mammal Review by Swedish zoologist Carl-Gustaf Thulin shows some declines in mountain hare distribution in Europe, especially Sweden and Russia. Competitive exclusion by brown hares and hybridisation are suggested as possible causes. Brown hares have been recorded several times feeding in heather moorland in the Peak District and it will be interesting to see if anything similar occurs here. A hybrid hare was reportedly shot in the NE Peak District near Holmfirth in 1963.

Report "The Mountain Hare in the Peak District" is available (£5 + £1 p&p)
from Dave Mallon Tel: 01457 853560

Mammal Recording in Derbyshire

by Derek Whiteley, Derbyshire Mammal Group Recorder

One of the main aims of the Group is to find out more about the status, distribution and ecology of mammals in Derbyshire. Everyone can contribute by sending in records of their observations. Each batch of local records adds to the big picture.

Derbyshire Mammal Group Recorder

My job as Derbyshire Mammal Group Recorder is to encourage people to submit records, then to collate and computerise them, to archive the record sheets for the Group and to export batches of computerised records to the Derbyshire Biological Records Centre (DBRC) at regular intervals.

I have set up a fresh copy of the software RECORDER 3.3 for the Group, and so far input about 1200 records. DBRC uses the same software, and Nick Moyes has been discussing with me about the best way to transfer records. I have used RECORDER 3.3 for many years, as I am also the County Recorder for Diptera (Flies!!!). That's another story.

DBRC currently has 9100 mammal records computerised on RECORDER, and a further 11600 records on other software awaiting transfer, and a further 5000+ records on paper awaiting input.

County Coverage

The north is generally better covered than the south, because the Sorby Mammal Group, Derek Yalden, DWT local groups and others have been recording and mapping mammals for over 30 years, making special efforts to cover as many OS grid squares as possible. There is much published information on the mammals of north Derbyshire and the Peak District. But don't let that put off you Northerners – there is still plenty to do.

The southern half of the county is more patchy, including many OS grid squares that have never been looked at, and have no mammal records at all. It is here that members of the Derbyshire Mammal Group can have a big impact, and redress the balance to give an even county coverage.

Species Coverage

Some species are very well covered because they have special Countywide surveys. Helen Perkins and colleagues continue a long-running survey and monitoring programme for water voles and mink. Mountain hares are well recorded, and the DWT is running a survey of brown hares countywide. No doubt, the combined knowledge of the county's Badger Groups would result in an accurate picture of status and distribution.

The same might be said for bats. Otters are receiving special attention too. For other species such as mice (three or four species) shrews (three species) small voles (two species) stoat, weasel, fox, rabbit, deer (four species), hedgehog, mole and even grey squirrel our knowledge is very patchy – in some areas good, in others poor. Don't ignore the well-recorded species. All records are required at present.

What to do

Well, just get outdoors, enjoy your mammal-watching, record your observations and send in your records to the Group. You can use a recording sheet, send by post or e-mail, or use your own spreadsheet, or a piece of blank paper or the back of an envelope or a fag packet. I can cope with any of those. The more information you record the better. What. Where. When. Who. Is a good start. A 4 figure grid reference is a basic requirement for mapping. A 6 or 8 figure reference is better. If you want to submit any confidential records I will store these in a sealed brown envelope with an embargo date on the outside, and they will not be computerised.

How Records are Used

You would be amazed. First of all the Group will be mapping all Derbyshire mammals with the aim of producing a County Atlas at some future date. Maps provide a useful summary of the big picture that is easy to understand. But behind the maps are the details. They can be used for site studies, site conservation, monitoring changes from year to year, habitat requirements, altitude distribution studies etc etc. The records will also contribute towards Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) for species and habitats.

We are hoping to exchange and share records with other mammal recorders in the county – for example the Sorby Mammal Recorder in north Derbyshire holds thousands of records. County records also contribute towards an even bigger picture. The Mammal Society is co-ordinating recording at national level, eventually leading to a new National Mammal Atlas.

Enjoy your Mammal-Watching



Field Vole
by Julian Jones



by Laura Berkeley

Erewash Meadows

by Debbie Court

Twenty-one well toggled-up people turned up for the Derbyshire Mammal Group's very first outdoor meeting on Sunday 16th February 2003. Despite the very cold weather we had an excellent day finding evidence of harvest mice in two separate parts of Erewash Meadows.

As most of the group were new to the art of harvest mouse nest searching, Dave Mallon, Helen Perkins and Derek Whiteley shared the benefit of their experience and showed examples of harvest mice nests found on other sites.

Jenny Wheeldon got the prize for finding the first harvest mouse nest in a clump of tufted hair grass, and what a whopper it was! For the next half an hour or so many people found nests only to be a bit disappointed to find out they were field vole nests, made from short pieces of grass and not woven into the existing vegetation like a harvest mouse nest.

We could not believe how many field voles there were in the field, and apart from the nests they left discrete piles of droppings around. One observation made was chopped rushes left in piles where the green stem had been chewed leaving the white pith.

The reed canary grass swamp started to turn up harvest mouse nests that were still visibly attached to the stems of the grass, Derek Whiteley also found a small number of non-breeding male harvest mouse nests.

After a spot of lunch and a warming cup of tea Dave Sneap, the Volunteer Reserve Manager for the site, suggested looking in a field which was mainly tufted hair-grass but had wetter pockets with reed canary-grass. After searching without much success in the tufted hair-grass, we struck gold in the reed canary-grass with five nests within a few metres of each other mostly still attached to the stems and in a recognisable state. As a bonus a fox made a brief appearance for those members of the group who didn't have their heads down in the long grass.



Harvest Mouse Nest
by Laura Berkeley

More on Mountain Hares

by Shirley Cross

The Mammal Society Easter Conference included a paper by Derek Yalden and Philip Wheeler entitled "More mountain hares in the peak district". Using distance equations they concluded that there may be as many as 10,000 hares in the Peak District.

Forthcoming Events

Derbyshire Mammal Group members are invited to join the Sorby Mammal Group for their annual brown hare count on Thursday 1st May 2003. Meet at the Monsal Head car park (the big one behind the hotel) at 7 pm. Don't pay unless you intend to leave your car there. We will divide into small groups to survey different parts of the White Peak for mad May hares. It's spring, it's evening and the hares will be active. Debriefing session at the Stable Bar at 9pm to compare results. Derek Whiteley at derek@kangaroo92.freeserve.co.uk

It is planned to keep an up to date listing of forthcoming mammal events on SmartGroups (details on page 4), so if you know of an event please send details to Steve Docker at steve@dock5.freeserve.co.uk

Have you checked your GPS?

by Steve Docker

I recently obtained a Global Positioning System (GPS), a Garmin® *etrex*, to record the position of my mammal survey findings. After taking a reading at a known landmark (a local church) and cross-checking against a grid reference obtained from an Ordnance Survey map I found it to be in error by about 400m in the northerly direction!

After checking the guides (which were not very helpful) I asked around other members of the Derbyshire Mammal Group and found that the problem had occurred before. After re-setting the GPS as follows the problem was solved:

Position FRMT: **British Grid**
and
Map Datum: **ord srvy GB**

So, if you use a GPS it may be as well to double-check its settings and crosscheck its accuracy before your next survey!

Water Voles in the Uplands Conference

More than eighty conservationists and leading experts from across the country gathered at Losehill Hall in March for the first National Upland Water Vole Conference, organised by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust's Water for Wildlife Project.

Research presented at the conference, from studies in the Caingorms, Snowdonia, North York Moors and the Peak District showed that the ecology and behaviour of upland voles differs from those in the lowlands and the threats they face are specific to these habitats. These differences may help to explain why they are not declining at such a rate as in the lowlands.

Copies of the papers from the conference are available from the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, at a price of £5 (to cover copying, binding and postage).

Extracts from "Paws For Thought, Apr 2003" with the permission of the DWT



Water Vole
by Julian Jones

SmartGroups

by Nick Moyes

Want a quick and easy way to keep in touch with other people interested in Derbyshire's mammals? Then why not join the Derbyshire mammals email group? This is a free internet-based system for keeping in touch by email.

Once you have joined the group, any email you send is automatically forwarded to all the other group members, as are their replies. You don't need to go to a website to read messages; they arrive like all other emails to your normal "inbox".

To gain access to the email group you will need to register with SmartGroups. You may already have received an automated invite, if so follow the links in that email to join the group. Alternatively, if this frightens you a bit, simply email me at Derby Museum and I'll process your request for you.

Finally, just to point out that we have only been talking about an email group here - not a full-blown website. This is a different issue, one that is being addressed by Jenny Wheeldon ... so watch this space.

Useful Contacts

The Mammal Society:
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enquiries@mammal.org.uk
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DMG Recorder: derek@kangaroo92.freemove.co.uk
Derek Whiteley

SmartGroups: www.smartgroups.com/groups/derbyshiremammals

**Derbyshire Biological
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nick.moyes@derby.gov.uk
Nick Moyes www.dbrc.freemove.co.uk

Derbyshire Wildlife Trust: Tel: 01773 881188
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www.derbyshirewildlifetrust.org.uk

Water for Wildlife Officer & Tel: 01773 881188
Otter Project: Philip Precey pprecey@derbywt.cix.co.uk

Water Vole Project: Tel: 01457 864825
Helen Perkins hmperkins@yahoo.co.uk

Many thanks to all those who contributed material for this issue and to 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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Unusual Mammal Sign at St Chads Water

by Steve Docker

On Sunday the 9th March 2003 the Derbyshire Mammal Group were out looking for signs of mammal activity at St Chads Water Local Nature Reserve. Very few signs were found but Dave Mallon did discover an unusual field sign. A cache of about 30 snail shells was found located in the undergrowth. All of the shells, which were of the same species and about 18mm in diameter, had been brought to the single location. Each shell had been opened, rather like a dormouse and a hazelnut, in order to remove the contents from inside. There were no other signs i.e. footprints, droppings etc.

It did not look like the work of a bird due to the ground location and the nature of the hole etc. The most likely candidate was thought to be a wood mouse but if anyone knows which species might have been responsible please let us know.