



Derbyshire Mammal Group News

Autumn
2011

(Issue 17)

Forthcoming Events:

Saturday 3 December
Harvest Mouse Nest Recording
Contact: Jo Bissell

Saturday 3 and Sunday 4 December
29th European Mustelid Colloquium. Southampton.
Contact: The Mammal Society

Sunday 11 December 13:30
Christmas Social. Carsington Water Visitor Centre.
A chance to get together and review the year, with some
entertainment and light food. Booking essential.
Contact: Liz Lonsdale

Saturday 10 and Sunday 11 March 2012
Mammal Society Conference and AGM. Greenwich.
Contact: The Mammal Society

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Hedgehog and Mink Eradication in the Outer Hebrides

Hedgehogs

On arrival on the Uists in May 2011 we noted a dead hedgehog on the road and remarked that we thought they had been removed from the Outer Hebrides. They are an introduced species, and have caused major upset in the breeding success of ground nesting birds.



A few days later, on South Uist, we saw another dead hedgehog at the bottom of a cattle grid. As we were close to the Scottish Natural Heritage office we popped in to report the sightings.

The status of the hedgehog eradication was not what we had thought. The hedgehog has been intensively trapped in North Uist and should now be at very low numbers. This is being monitored. The major trapping effort is now on the next most southern island, Benbecula (linked to North Uist and South Uist by causeway). On South Uist there has been no trapping and there are currently no plans for it to start. The logistics of covering this area are difficult as there is

much upland (with rough ground and few paths) and the hedgehogs are known to live quite high up on the hills.

We noted somewhat ironically that on North Uist, from where the hedgehogs had been 'removed', the cattle grids had hedgehog escape ladders.

Mink

The old story of mink being released from fur farms and causing problems in the environment is also relevant in the Outer Hebrides. The animals are quite widespread in Lewis and Harris, where a trapping programme has been undertaken. About 7,500 traps have been deployed on a rotational basis. In the Uists a monitoring programme is being undertaken and any small populations are dealt with when discovered. Mink are suspected of crossing from Harris to North Uist over the sound of Harris, but their method of transport is not proven.

They may be swimming, or hitching a lift on unsuspecting vehicles.



Liz Lonsdale

Sika Deer

On a visit to north-west Scotland in June 2011 myself, Steve Lonsdale, Jo Bissell, and Ian Wildbur took a walk up a forestry track. Eventually we reached a perimeter gate where we paused and observed two deer grazing not far away. As we were expecting to see Red Deer the fact that these deer had spotted coats was a surprise. We quickly realised they were Sika Deer (*Cervus nippon nippon*).

Wishing to get a closer view, Ian skilfully opened the gate without the bolt making too much of a squeak, and we crept out onto the hillside. The wind was in our favour, so Steve crept towards the deer, and Jo and I moved higher up the track to gain a better view. After a few minutes there was a shrill whistle - Jo and I had been spotted by three more deer which quickly ran off, one of them giving the warning call. The call had alerted the other deer in the area which also moved off - we counted a total of six deer.

Later in the week, after much fieldwork looking for tracks, signs, and droppings, we deployed a camera trap ('Stealthcam') adjacent to a deer path in the forestry plantation. After three days, downloading the photos revealed several of Ian and Steve setting up the camera, but also two shots of a Sika Deer walking down the track.



Sika Deer are native to the Japanese Islands, and were introduced to this country for deer parks between 1860 and 1920. There are also two sub-species (Asiatic and Taiwanese forms) in the UK but they are not established in the wild. The spread of Sika Deer is mainly from deer park escapes, and they are widespread in Scotland and sporadic across England (eg New Forest, Forest of Bowland, Lake District, Poole basin).

Sika Deer are identified from other deer by the white caudal patch (on their bottom) with a white tail. The Fallow Deer (*Dama dama*) has a similar caudal patch but a black tail that is vigorously flicked. The Sika Deer antlers are similar in structure to the Red Deer (*Cervus elaphus*) but never grow as large - a maximum of 8 tines. Sika can (and do) interbreed with Red Deer and there is some concern that this may lead to the extinction

of 'pure' Red Deer in Britain.

Liz Lonsdale

Long-haired Fallow Deer

On October 15 2011 five members of Derbyshire Mammal Group visited Mortimer Forest near Ludlow to see the 'Long-haired' Fallow Deer. The visit was organised with Alan Reid, Wildlife Ranger, for the Forestry Commission.



Long-haired Fallow Deer - note ear tufts and long hairy tail.

After a briefing about the status of deer in the Shropshire / North Hereford area we went to a large enclosed area where a small herd of the deer were held. They have been the subject of university research for many years. The hairiness is a genetic aberration and only occurs in the Mortimer Forest population. The herd is maintained to keep this trait. Whilst this small group had been in the enclosed area for many years, they have maintained their wild nature. On sight of six people entering the area they immediately went to the far side. Enticements of bread and carrots was spread in an area in front of the elevated hide. Initially a young buck came to feed but soon exited, with the characteristic 'pronking' jumps, back to the cover of the wood.

Alan walked the perimeter of the fence to gently coax the other deer into the feeding area. Once they found the bread they stayed for 20 minutes giving us all good views of their hairy coats, ear tufts and long hairy tails.

As the daylight was drawing in, we left the enclosure and drove through the forest tracks to an area where Alan knew there were calling Fallow Deer bucks. We very quietly made our way through the plantation (Alan had removed as many twigs on the ground as he could find!) and arrived where a camouflage net had been erected. From here we could see a buck walking round his 'stand' and calling. The sound was a gruff

'piggy' noise quite different to a Red Deer bellow. Several does were seen but the action was quiet. We then moved up the hill to see three more bucks on their stands in an open field area which has been preserved especially for the deer. In the fast fading light we made our way back to the cars. We were very appreciative of the efforts that Alan had made to make this a memorable visit to see these unique deer.

Liz Lonsdale

DMG Visit to Calke Abbey - 29 October 2011

Eleven members of DMG joined Bill Cove at Calke Abbey for a 'Deer' Day.

The day started with an informative talk on the species of Deer we can see in the UK, their spread throughout the country, the damage they can cause and how to spot signs that deer are in an area. Bill enlightened us with his own observations of deer behaviour and pointed out some key identification points - hopefully we now know our Roes from our Reds!

A break for lunch, and then a short drive out to South Wood to identify some of the deer signs that had previously been shown to us in the presentation. We also took in the Brick Kilns at Ticknall to see some of the devastating effects deer can have when they live in high densities in an area. Following that Bill took us into the deer park where we had some great views of the Fallow



Photo: Jo Bissell

and Red Deer that are kept there. We were even given a show of two stags fighting and they also decided to show off with a bit of bellowing - Bill had trained them well!!

Thanks to all for making it a lovely day

Jo Bissell



Photo: Albert Frame

Derbyshire Mammal Atlas - Update

The Atlas Project is slowly reaching a conclusion. Over 90,000 records have been logged on the DMG database, including a full set of bat records from Derbyshire Bat Conservation Group. 42 species accounts have been prepared, covering all species recorded in the county in recent years, and a distribution map produced for each one, using DMAP. These accounts are now undergoing final checks.

A large set of photographs has been assembled and the best ones will be selected to illustrate the text. Introductory sections covering the history of mammals in Derbyshire, former studies, the geography and habitats of the county, threats to mammals and their conservation, and other topics have either been prepared or are currently in the drafting phase. Dr Derek Yalden, President of the Mammal Society has kindly agreed to write the Foreword.

Once the text is all finalised, it will be proof-read to check for inconsistencies and typos, then we will work on the full layout of the book so that the final manuscript is 'print-ready'.

We expect to deliver it to the printer in early 2012 and hope to see publication within a couple of weeks after that.

Dave Mallon

The Day We Went to Bangor

On 12th November six members of DMG arrived at the University of Bangor for a Mammal Society Regional Seminar hosted by the Snowdonia Mammal Group.

The day's agenda of seven talks and a choice of workshops was divided into three sessions, separated by lunch and tea in the natural history museum. There were many fascinating exhibits of stuffed animals and skeletons to wander round whilst enjoying the refreshments.

'Brown Hares in the North-West' given by Derek Yalden, The Mammal Society President, looked at the evidence and reasons for the historical decline in hare numbers. Recent agricultural changes (e.g. Set aside, Stewardship schemes) should have helped hare numbers recover and a new survey is required to see if the BAP target of doubling the national population of hares to 1.6million by 2010 has been achieved.

'Positive work with Badgers' was an overview of the work undertaken by Penny and Dave Lewns. As ecological consultants they are involved when badger setts are affected by developments. Penny illustrated how artificial main setts and foraging areas are created to relocate badgers. The badgers appear to take to these artificial setts, and continue to use them either as their main sett if the old one is destroyed, or as a temporary sett whilst developers are working at the main sett site.

Jack Grasse entertained the after-lunch audience with 'Searching for Dormice'. Jack has years of experience and no doubt our Dormouse Team will be taking on board the 'Careful Research And Planning' advice, along with a pronged stick. His experiment with Dormouse-opened hazelnuts was a useful indicator of age of nuts, also noting that the greenish nuts were this year's crop and therefore evidence of current Dormice. He has also found Dormice in a conifer plantation where, they are thought to have an insectivorous diet.

In 2010 a new species of bat was discovered in Britain, *Myotis alcaethoe*. Anita Glover gave us an account of the work done to verify the Alcaethoe Bat in Yorkshire and Sussex. It is probably only a matter of time before it is found elsewhere in the UK.

Kate Williamson of the Snowdonia Mammal Group described the trial of tunnels to capture the footprints of hedgehogs. The triangular plastic tunnels had an inked pad in the centre and paper sheets at each entrance. The tunnels were baited with hot dogs(!). The trial was very successful in recording positive hedgehog results compared with spotlighting, and looks like a method that could be widely used.

'Coastal Otters of North Wales' gave an insight into the survey methods used by Chris Hall and the Snowdonia Mammal Group to look for otter signs around the North Wales coast. The collection and DNA analysis of spraints is beginning to yield information about individual otters in the area.

Following on from the otter talk, Pete Turner described the use of 'Non-invasive Mammal Monitoring Techniques'. This is the use of DNA from collected mammal droppings and bird pellets to show evidence

of mammal species. He showed analysis of Kestrel pellets containing remains of Pygmy and Greater White-toothed Shrews. When plotted on a map there appeared to be a distinct area where GWT shrews existed and Pygmy Shrews did not. Why? - a question to be answered.

The day ended with thanks from Johnny Birks, the Mammal Society Chairman, and the drawing of the raffle. None of us won a prize.

Liz Lonsdale

The next edition of this newsletter is planned for February 2012. Please forward any articles (on any mammal or DMG related subject) to Steve Lonsdale (Lons57@gmail.com).

Opinions expressed in this Newsletter are those of the individual authors, and may not represent the views of Derbyshire Mammal Group.

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