



Derbyshire Mammal Group

Newsletter

Winter 2018/19 Issue 31

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Mammal recording sessions

These went well in 2018, adding some useful mammal records to unrecorded areas, including the Osmaston/Shirley area, farmland near Ashbourne, Poolsbrook Country Park and two parts of the Cromford Canal. It was great to see Water Voles in seemingly increased numbers in and around the canal.

There will be more of these sessions in 2019.

Rare Pine Marten found in Derbyshire

On the baking hot afternoon of Tuesday 3rd July during the exceptional heat-wave we experienced last summer I received a telephone call from a friend, wildlife photographer Andrew Parkinson, saying that he had just driven past a pine marten, a road casualty he'd just spotted lying on the carriageway next to the central reservation of the A38 about a mile south of Ripley.

Andy said that he was actually on his way to Wales, but was going to come off at the next junction and drive back up to Ripley so that he could drive past again for a second look. He called back a short while later confirming he was now 100% certain it really was a pine marten!

I decided I would drive up to Ripley to see for myself. He described where he'd seen it and sure enough, lying on the white line demarking the A38's central reservation, I could see the unfortunate animal and attempted to take a photograph of it as I passed by.

As this was such a rare discovery for Derbyshire, I realised it would be difficult to convince others of what we had seen. I could imagine them suggesting it was probably a dead cat, or perhaps a ferret and so decided it was vital to retrieve the animal's body to provide indisputable proof of its identification. Considering its location, achieving that was obviously going to be difficult. The badger group had long since given up any thoughts of attempting to remove road casualty animals from busy dual carriageways.

I thought long and hard about how this might be achieved and eventually went with my husband for a recce later that evening, when it was obvious that there was still far too much traffic. We drove home deciding to try again a few hours later. So in the early hours of the following morning, with my husband's somewhat reluctant assistance and a degree of derring-do on my part I managed to achieve its retrieval. Returning triumphant, I could scarcely believe I was clutching a dead, slightly, but not unpleasantly pungent, pine marten in my hand. My husband would not concur with that comment and said he couldn't wait to get home and out of the car.



However, I feel bound to discourage anyone else from considering a similar course of action, as I confess the whole exercise was far more tricky than I had initially anticipated, and potentially a very dangerous venture.

I had immediately informed the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust after it had first been seen and once I had it, next day I called the Vincent Wildlife Trust, who I knew had a particular interest in pine martens. On that night, my first thought about how and why it had turned up there, was that it had very probably fallen, perhaps from a lorry, as so many park up overnight, often on rural lay-bys up and down the country. The area around Ripley would certainly not be considered prime marten habitat.

On his return from Wales next day Andy was delighted to hear the animal had been retrieved, having himself been considering how that might be achieved. He mentioned an idea he'd had, which I assured him would never have worked!

Scientists from the Vincent Wildlife Trust, based in Herefordshire, are undertaking research into Pine Martens and they collected the now frozen animal's body from me later that day. Despite a small amount of damage to its nether regions they were able to confirm it was a male of the species. It had sustained some damage as one of its hind legs, though complete, was only just still attached, but the rest of the animal was intact. There was no fly strike, despite it having lain exposed throughout the heat of the day, no flies or damage from predatory birds, doubtless due to the sheer volume of traffic passing by within inches of its body.

How fortunate indeed that Andy had recognised what he had seen, that it was relatively undamaged due to its position on the busy road and that it was able to be retrieved. I was totally amazed when two months later I learned that it had been found to be micro-chipped! Not just that either –the micro-chip confirmed it was actually PM3, in the VWT's Pine Marten Recovery Project!

On 28th September Dr Jenny McPherson from the Vincent Wildlife Trust visited the offices of the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust to give a presentation on their Pine Marten Recovery Project underway in North Ceredigion, Central Wales, which had commenced in 2014. The project's aim is to enhance a pre-existing low density small population of those mammals found to be already in that area, through a carefully thought out release programme of selected kits from Scotland.

Apparently 'our' pine marten had already previously demonstrated his wanderlust and was thought to have possibly been a sub dominant male, who had earlier moved some distance after other males appeared in his territory. Their work had indicated that movements over a distance of 140 km are possible, but they reserved judgement over how PM3 came to be found here..

Back in Wales, their project recorded its first Welsh born kits in Spring 2016 as martens don't reach maturity for breeding until their third year. In 2017 the first kits arrived resulting from matings in Wales. They have spread over a wide area, with low-density recorded at present and it is expected that it will take 10 years for numbers to double. Fifty one animals were released over three autumns and after initially being kept in 8 release pens sited 1km apart they were released into an area where 200 boxes had been put up in prime habitat above ground. The project employs non-invasive monitoring with bib patterns being used to identify individuals. Hair sampling is used with kits, which are not micro-chipped.

For the un-initiated, Pine Martens are a rich chestnut brown with a creamy yellow bib under their throat and chest and are around 45cm in length, with a 25cm bushy tail. They rely upon well-connected mixed species woodland habitat, climb very well and live in holes in trees, old squirrel drays and suchlike and are members of the mustelidae family, related to badgers, otters, stoats etc. A truly iconic UK species.

There have been sporadic reports of pine martens in the county, how wonderful it would be to see more of them.

Irene Brierton. Mid
Derbyshire Badger Group



Plight of the Water Vole in Derbyshire

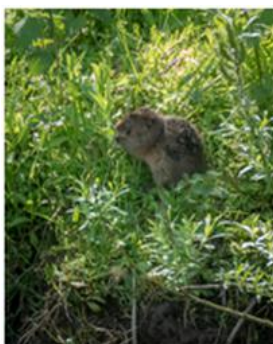


On the 26 February 2018, the Wildlife Trust reported a 30% decline in the places where these river mammals lived across England and Wales, during the survey period 2006 - 2015. Responding to the plight of the water vole and having a desire to help in some way, I signed up at the beginning of the year to volunteer with Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, with whom I am also a member. My task would be to conduct water vole and otter surveys.

Following the day- long training, I was allocated an area, which has now been extended to four areas as I enjoy a challenge! The four areas vary from a small brook on an estate in a thriving market town to the high moors. Over the last year I have visited each area several times between May and October.



The signs are positive and I have seen several voles, particularly in one of my patches each time I visit. Fieldsigns include faeces, footprints, runs, burrows, latrines and feeding stations.



Sightings are rare but the tell tale sound of “plop” is always an indication of their presence when they have seen or heard me checking the banks for indicators of life.

A bonus of spending so much time outside observing water voles in their habitat is that you also get to see other wildlife and their behaviour throughout the seasons too. I have seen all sorts of birds, from kestrels to mallards and lots in between including curlew and coot nests containing clutches of eggs. Invertebrates and flora during this hot summer have been in abundance, helping to keep the eco system in balance.



Signs of humans and the impact of their behaviour on the fragility of the water vole habitat are also evident and the message of waste control, fly tipping and plastic disposal must continue to be an urgent public message.

Colin D. Smith

A Trip to Siberia and Outer Mongolia, September 2018

The title makes it sound exotic and in some ways it was much more of an adventure than a holiday. We landed in Ulan Bator from Moscow and boarded a bus to take us back over the Russian border to the shores of Lake Baikal (a 9 hour drive plus 2 hours at the border). The following morning we could appreciate the wonderful forest in the reserve on the doorstep.

The plan was to take a boat out to an island to see the Baikal seals. The previous day there had been a storm on the lake so no-one could tell us if the seals would be there. We started in an old Russian 4x4 bus for the drive to the port and the fishing boat. It was a clear day but cold and windy, giving us lovely views of the snow covered peaks. When we arrived at the island the ranger told us the seals were not there; apparently the storm had driven them from the rocks and they had not yet returned. Disappointed, we returned to the boat for a very good lunch. As we made our way back a head was spotted in the water, so we asked the captain to slow down to give us time for a proper look. It was quite tricky but we did manage at least 5 seals, the last one giving us reasonable views. Not quite as good as we had hoped but at least we all saw a head.

The next morning we explored the local area and saw several birds, Siberian chipmunk and a Muskrat before starting the long drive back to Ulan Bator for the following evening. It was now time to drive 9 hours south to Dalanzadgad (DZ) and our last comfortable hotel for a week. The town lies just north of Gurvan Saikhan national park which covers 27,000 sq km of the Gobi province of Mongolia.



Arriving at our Gir camp we settled in and enjoyed lunch in the cooking gir. The girls had beds with thick sleeping bags and a stove. Now we could start our quest in earnest spending long hours staring at distant hillsides trying to sit still and stay quiet while sitting on very hard pointed rocks. For 2 days we tried different areas and I was very grateful to the young guides who helped me up and most importantly down the steep scree slopes.

Suddenly, the chief guide and one of the shepherds thought they could see something and, sure enough, about 1km away on a rock was a Snow leopard. We stared through the scopes for 30 minutes and the head went up and yawned and he started to wash his whiskers. As we all watched in wonder he stood up and stretched and slowly made his way across the hillside disappearing behind rocks and looking around before jumping

onto a crag and walking over the ridge and out of sight. Suddenly we were all very noisy and congratulating ourselves on our success. I could quite happily have returned home.

We now looked for other wildlife but it was very quiet, we did see Pallas's cat, pikas, gerbils, a jerboa and some gazelles. There were Argali and Ibex for the leopards but the main prey seemed to be the domestic stock hundreds of sheep, goat, cattle, yaks, ponies and camels.

Two days after our leopard sighting one of the shepherds came to camp to tell us one of his goats had been taken and he could see drag marks up the hill. We climbed the hill again but this time knowing the guide could see a Snow leopard on a rock. (How they spot them I shall never know, little dots in the distance that occasionally move). This cat too stretched and yawned and moved a bit but not far. On a rock just below our cat someone saw a little grey bundle of fur move. Two young cubs were playing hide and seek in the rocks. After a couple of hours the mother went towards her cubs and must have called to them as they started to climb towards her and we could now count 3 cubs. They suckled and had a wash before she led them up the hill towards her original resting place. They stopped just before the rock and started to play with what we could now see was the remains of the goat. It would be nice to say they were eating it but that would be an exaggeration, sucking it playing tug of war and chasing each other away would be a better description.

By 18.30 it was getting dark and we still had to get back down this steep hill, oh! to be a mountain goat. We had watched the family since 13.30 so for 5 hours and left them still playing and hoping they would survive. This will partly be down to the locals; predators are shot for taking livestock but they should be protected in the National Park and we left generous tips to encourage them to believe the Snow leopards are worth more alive than dead. The shepherds did appear to enjoy watching them as much as we did and were proud to be able to show them to us but there are hundreds of hunters in Mongolia and many skins are exported every year including many Pallas's cats. The 2 groups before us had not seen them at all.

The reason for choosing Mongolia was the possibility of seeing Snow Leopard at 2500m rather than the 4500m in the Himalayas. It still snowed and we had a frost each night but it was about 0 to -2 so not the -15 in Hemis National Park.

We were incredibly lucky with our views not close, about 1km away but long and exciting, so would I recommend it? Yes if you are feeling adventurous and are reasonably fit. Would I do it again? No, I don't think so but then I don't need to.

Totals for trip 17 mammals and 78 birds.

Shirley Cross

Don't forget the group has a twitter account [@derbysmammals](https://twitter.com/derbysmammals)
Now with 599 followers!



Thank you to all those who have contributed to this newsletter. Apologies to anyone who sent something to me but hasn't had it appear in this issue. It will be used in the next issue.

Pellets and Poo workshop



On December 9th we had a good turnout at Carsington for this workshop.

We had a huge bag of owl pellets (enough to keep pellet analysis sessions going for years!) from which we each picked a few.

Pellets were picked apart carefully and bones extracted for identification. Using books, guides and the microscopes.

Six species were recorded, 76 field voles, 17 wood mice, 3 brown rats, 6 c shrews, 1 pygmy shrew & 1 bank vole from the barn owl pellets

The second half of the session involved looking at mammal droppings, large and small.



Dave Alston

Edible Dormice in Hertfordshire

Debbie and I recently helped on the nest box checks as part of the Edible dormouse, *Glis glis* monitoring scheme near Tring in Hertfordshire.



Unlike at our local Hazel dormouse site, it was unusual to find an unoccupied box.

These animals certainly had teeth and were prepared to use them, as Debbie found out!

I managed to escape being bitten, but may not be as lucky next time!



Dave Alston

Derbyshire Mammal Group

Chair: Debbie Alston

01773 821804

debbie@debbiealston.co.uk

Secretary: Jo Bissell

07708 248776

Jo.ian@live.co.uk

Treasurer: Shirley Cross

crosssk@btinternet.com

Group Recorder: Debbie Alston

01773 821804 (evenings)

alston@debsndave.plus.com

Website Admin: Dave Alston

01773 821804 (evenings)

webadmin@derbyshiremammalgroup.org.uk

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