

Wiltshire Mammal Group



Summer 2014

Welcome to the summer edition of the Wiltshire Mammal Group newsletter. We hope you enjoy this newsletter, and indeed, the recent events that the group has provided. A huge thanks you to all, whether you have helped organise the events or supported the group by attending them!

Notes from the Chair

The fantastic weather of early spring has been replaced more recently by increasingly familiar spring deluges, seemingly an increasingly frequent result of climate change. Mammal recording has continued at pace throughout the spring. Good numbers of Brown Hares are being recorded, as well as a number of interesting mustelids; Otter sightings near Wootton Bassett, a scattering of Polecat/Polecat-ferrets across the county from several observers (mainly road kill unfortunately!), and Stoats and Weasels across south Wiltshire, thanks to some of the RSPB fieldworkers. Local photographer, Steve Dewey (www.flickr.com/steve_dewey) was in the right place at the right time in May, when he photographed a female Red Deer on the eastern edge of the Savernake, near Marlborough. Good to finally get photographic proof of this species in the county. Some observers suggest they are escapes from a local deer farm, but they appear to be breeding. Last autumn two stags were noted rutting close to the M4 by a passing motorist!

Please remember to look out for Polecats and Polecat-ferrets, whether dead on the roads, or alive. Vincent Wildlife Trust are updating the known distribution of these



Red Deer photographed in Savernake near Marlborough, with thanks to Steve Dewey (May, 2014).

species in the UK and updating the previous National Polecat Survey. If you see a Polecat / Polecat-ferret, please submit the record either to Wiltshire Mammal Group (in one of the usual ways), or send it direct to Lizzie Croose at Vincent Wildlife Trust, recording the Grid reference and name of the nearest settlement and the date. If possible, provide some photographs (but only if you can access carcasses on roadsides safely), ideally one of the full body, including the paws, and a close-up photo of the face. If it is not possible to take a photo, record the coat colour of the animal (e.g. polecat-like, sandy, silver, albino). Further information can be found on the Vincent Wildlife Trust website (www.vwt.org.uk). Please email this information to enquiries@vwt.org.uk or phone 01531 636441 if you need any guidance.



Polecat RTA, Warminster (Michael Groves)

And whilst looking out for Polecat road kills, please also keep an eye out for squished Hedgehogs for Ben Williams' PhD study (see later article). It's worth remembering that mammals noted dead on the roadside comprise good biological records; please record what you see on the roadsides whilst travelling.

Numbers of mammal records are still flowing in to us at a healthy rate as WMG members and friends, and many other recorders across Wiltshire, submit records for the Wiltshire Mammal Atlas Project. During 2012 and 2013 a total of 1300 mammal records were submitted to Living Record; since late January 2014 to date another thousand records have been submitted! On top of this is a steady submission of datasets from recorders around the county via spreadsheets, as well as the new Mammal Tracker App! It's great to see some great recording efforts by so many.

Some clear gaps in coverage are appearing however. North Wiltshire's recorders are submitting three times the number of records as South Wiltshire at the moment, so there are blank squares across much of South Wiltshire at present, in particular in the Cranbourne Chase AONB area. Other areas lacking current record include the Malmsbury area and the Marlborough Downs. Species currently lacking in records (particularly considering their relative abundance) include Brown Hare and most rodents and shrews. Water voles are being casually recorded at a number of rivers across the county but we have significant gaps in range, so if you know you have water voles nearby, please go and check they are still there and submit some records.

Wiltshire's rarest mammal, based on the number of records? Potentially, and admittedly slightly tongue-in-cheek, it is the House Mouse! How many of you have House Mice in your houses???

For those interested in Dormice, monthly box checks continue at a number of sites; to get involved in the Savernake and North Wraxall

schemes, please see the details at the end of the newsletter. We also checked the tubes we recently deployed to the woodlands near Warminster; no evidence of Dormice yet but it's still early days. In addition, thanks to funding from the Forestry Commission and support from PTES, we have just received a new batch of 110 boxes to be deployed at three Forestry Commission woodlands over the summer; some are to supplement the Savernake Forest scheme, others are destined for West Wood (Marlborough) and Webbs Wood (Brinkworth).

Catherine and Ben have been busy rolling out the Hedgehog Project, with another talk and a survey tunnel-making workshop at Lackham College. They are now looking for volunteers willing to host survey tunnels to deliver surveys for Hedgehogs (as well as other small mammals). Please get in touch if you're interested in joining in.

During the group meeting in April, and then since, there has been some discussion about doing some "square-bashing" surveys of parts of Wiltshire currently lacking in records and survey effort. Such surveys are aimed at targeting survey effort to areas that need it. Organising a group of people in such areas to spend a few hours recording can often stimulate ongoing recording, as well as yield the records of the day too. Cranbourne Chase AONB is perhaps the obvious place to start. We hope to arrange some dates soon and if anyone would like to help organise this, please let us know. We urgently need additional organisers!

And finally, can I offer a HUGE thank you to Sioned Snowden. Sioned has volunteered with WMG and the Wiltshire & Swindon Biological Records Centre (WSBRC) for the past year, supporting the mammal group through its re-launch and reorganisation, as well as rolling out the atlas project, quarterly newsletters and much more! Much of the group's current success was borne from Sioned's hard work. Sioned recently started a new job, prior to returning to her final year of

her degree at Aberystwyth University. We hope to see Sioned at some events soon!

A thank you is also overdue to Lis Weidt, WMG member also supporting the group by collating the newsletter and organising some forthcoming events.

If we are to become a more vibrant group, with more events and training sessions, then we need more helpers to help organise them. If anyone is interested in this, please do get in touch.

[Gareth Harris, Chair, WMG]

Cue fanfare...It's here! The new website!

On the 4th July the new WMG website went live! Hurrah! Using the website we'll be able to more easily promote events and surveys, circulate newsletters and other information, and generally help raise the profile of the group.

<http://wiltshiremammals.wordpress.com>

The site will be used as a main point of communication with members, 'friends' and the general public ensuring they are kept up to date on current news and dates of forthcoming events and surveys, as well as any future plans. The blog site can be 'followed' which will allow members to receive any new posts direct to their inboxes without having to regularly check the website. This should ensure no one misses out on anything they might want to get involved with. Take a look around and tell us what you think!

Please spread the word! [Purgle Linham]

Confessions of a living record recorder

Why do people bother to record wildlife? Or is it due to a crushing inability to develop a real hobby? A by-product of behaviour that would be more suited to collecting train numbers? Or is it a belief that data obtained

in the field will somehow be of use in the long term conservation of species or habitats?

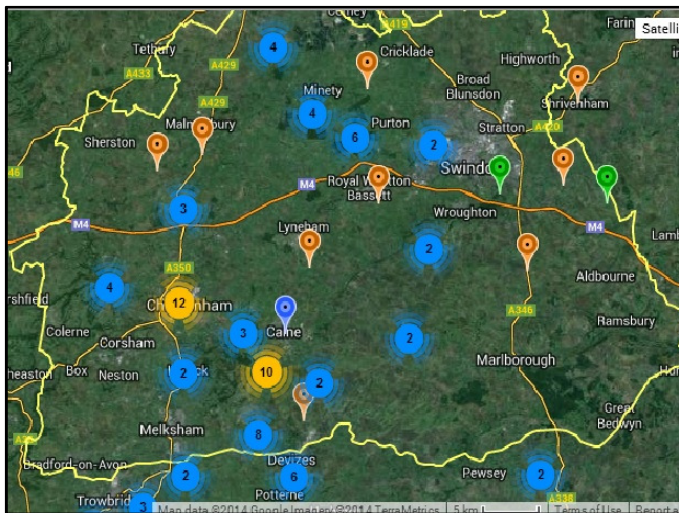
Of course people need motivation and who doesn't go out recording in the belief that they may find something rare, scarce, first for the county or just really interesting?? It's human nature. In the past however, the collection of data could be rather arcane, time-consuming and perhaps quite individual. However with Living Record you can instantly see where you have recorded, when and to what frequency, and crucially, see how your records compare with others. Suddenly you can see how you're part of a recording community and a whole new world opens up!

I spent the winter months diligently entering data for multiple taxa (vascular plants, mammals, amphibians, various invertebrates etc.) into multiple spreadsheets, each with subtly different requirements. I would like to say that this process was simple but it dragged on into the New Year and still I hadn't finished sorting out my records. Part of the problem is that the summer months are so busy spent recording that you inevitably end up with a backlog.

During this time I stumbled into the committee with the Wiltshire Mammal Group contributing what I can and determining to record more mammals. It was suggested that I use the new system. I was slightly sceptical to start with – after all I had been 'using that clobbering stick nigh on 15 years to scrub these pots and won't be changing now!' but with password in one hand and records in the other, I slowly added my first record. AND THERE IT WAS. A dot. The Location Marker, with a record. A start. A new record.

As I became familiar with the system it became even easier and soon I could see on the screen what I had achieved. And by using the Distribution Maps within Living Record I could also see a spread of records across Wiltshire too, placing my own records into context. Everyone likes to see the fruits of their labours. For me the process of recording

had become more personal and rewarding – who needed a thank you from a county recorder when I could see what I had done? For illustration's sake I provide a screen shot from my records in Vice County 7 (North Wiltshire) to date. This mapping system provides a good overview of areas not covered and a quick pop into the distribution section reveals that only 4 records of house mouse are in VC 7.



Tim Kaye records for Vice County 7 (North Wiltshire)

Obviously the house mouse is in dire need of a long term, multi-agency funded recovery project to bring in back from the brink? Or is it just really under-recorded??

I have discovered of course that an easy way to get data is to put on all mole hills and any mammal carcasses seen on the roads. What the system really highlights though is that it's easy – anyone can identify a rabbit (if you can't you probably shouldn't be reading this anyway) and data of common species is just as important as that of rarer species.

A quick walk to empty the dog will no doubt bring a chance observation of a deer or hare in a local patch. It is heartening to spot something that is less common such as a Water Shrew as I did or chance upon a Weasel running across a road. If every one of the 470,000 people in Wiltshire recorded just 10 species instead of watching 'Take me out' with Paddy McGuinness that would be

nearly 5 million records – an amazing contribution for nature conservation.

Seriously though, if you have spotted something, use the system. I have started recording other taxa apart from mammal on it now too. It means I can log and submit records throughout the year. And once mammal records are submitted to Living Record I know that they have been submitted to Wiltshire Mammal Group, who verify and check all records before submitting them to the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre too. It gives me a lot more confidence that my records are being used and it also gives me a better way to manage and submit my records.

The other advantage of the system is that you can see what other people have recorded and for a professional Mrs Mangle* like me, it's great. Using the Distribution Maps to display at 1km level, by all or by individual mammal species enables you to see distribution maps of each vice county and gain a good idea of recording effort. This is a good way to assess which parts of the county may be best for seeing Brown hare for example, or you could think to yourself, let's go to that square that has no records or even adopt one of the 10km squares that have no Wiltshire Mammal Atlas Project surveyor!

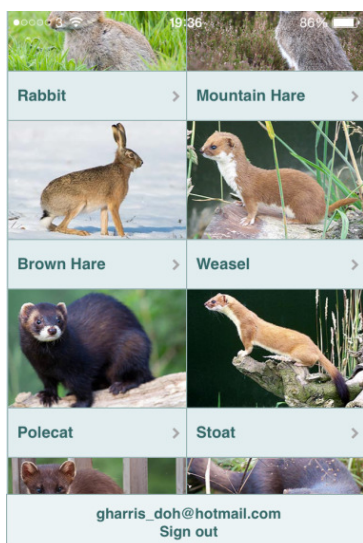
Living Record is a brilliant recording tool and any tool that helps people to record wildlife is a good thing. Now we just need another article to talk about the difficulty of identifying some of the mammal species..... [Tim Kaye, Secretary]

*For those people not sad enough to watch Neighbours in the 1980s, Mrs Mangle was a character in *Neighbours* who was a serial gossip and stickybeak.

Wiltshire Mammal Group can offer training sessions for Living Record; for more information contact Gareth Harris.

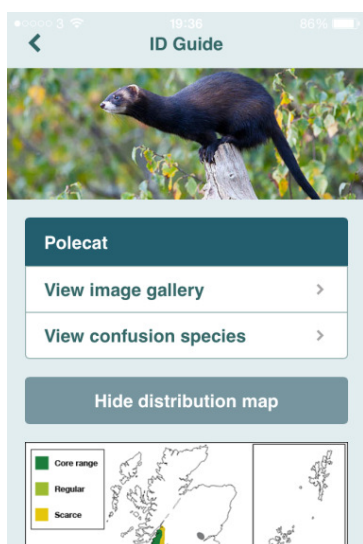
Mammal Tracker App for iOS and Android

You may have seen the recent press release from the Mammal Society regarding the new Mammal Tracker App. See here: http://www.brc.ac.uk/mammal_tracker/. Available for iOS and Android this app has been developed by Wiltshire's own Dave Kilbey, the Project Manager of NatureLocator, and friend of Wiltshire Mammal Group.



In recent years NatureLocator (<http://naturelocator.org/>) have created a series of Apps to promote the recording of a range of species, for example, Ladybirds and Leaf Miners. The Mammal Tracker App is just the latest in this series.

The App is available free from the iTunes App store and Android Market and includes guidance on species identification, differentiating "Confusion Species" and enables you to submit geo-located photos. I tested this out over the weekend and was impressed by it and would recommend it to anyone.



The App uses the built-in GPS of a smart phone to generate the grid reference. A series of prompts allows you to record the date, location, species and abundance. A "notes" field allows you to record additional information such as the circumstances of the record, numbers of adults, juveniles etc.

All data sent to this App will be uploaded to iRecord, where we can verify and download it. We can therefore ensure that all data uploaded to this App and to iRecord will contribute to the Wiltshire Mammal Atlas Project. I consider this App to be another item in the recording toolbox, rather than a replacement of the other tools such as Living Record. If you're happy using Living Record for example, please continue to do so. Not all tools suit everyone though, so hopefully Apps such as Mammal Tracker will attract and encourage new recorders.

This App may provide a useful additional tool for recorders so give it a go! I'd be interested in any feedback. [Gareth Harris].

Wiltshire Hedgehog Project Update

Following the successful hedgehog construction event at Lackham Collage at the end of April we now have, with many thanks to the volunteers who helped put them together - 50 hedgehog foot-print tunnels, ready for distribution around Wiltshire.

The tunnels can be used in different ways from recording hedgehog presence local to you, such as in your garden or if a slightly larger survey appeals, 10 tunnels can be used to undertake a survey called the 10 tunnel protocol, which involves placing tunnels over a 1km square. Tunnels are



baited and primed with ink then placed out over a period of 5 nights or less if you find footprints sooner. Being light and simple to use the tunnels are a great way to survey for hedgehogs and other mammals who pass

through leaving a hopefully clear trail of inky footprints behind, which are then collected each day, dated and recorded with the location. If any help is needed with identifying the footprints the WMG will be happy to do so.

Those of you who have previously registered your interest in getting involved will have received an email asking you to get in touch with your tunnel requests. If you've not been contacted and would like to get involved, please do get in touch and help build up a picture of hedgehog hotspots in Wiltshire. Catherine Hosie, email: cvf.hosie@gmail.com

Specialist Hedgehog Research by the University of Reading

With hedgehog populations estimated to have declined in some parts of the UK by approximately 20% in the last 20 years; the Peoples Trust for Endangered Species say that hedgehogs are declining at the same rate as other animals globally, such as wild tigers! One possible factor contributing to this decline is the fragmentation effect of major roads on hedgehog populations i.e. hedgehogs avoid crossing these major roads, leading to populations becoming more and more isolated from one another, which potentially makes them more vulnerable to other factors such as habitat loss and climate change. Ecologists at the University of Reading are currently conducting a project examining the possible impact of road networks on hedgehog populations and your assistance would be much appreciated.

For this study, genetic samples from hedgehogs in a zone approximately 10 miles north and south of the M4 between Bristol and London (M25) are required. One source of these genetic samples is the bodies of hedgehogs that have been killed on the roads. Because many hedgehogs now seem to be living in and around villages, the help of people living in or regularly passing

through this study zone would be of great help. If you spot a dead hedgehog, the research team would love to hear from you – by reporting sightings you will be helping important research that aims to have a positive impact on the hedgehog population in the area. To report any sightings, please get in touch via this email: hedgehogs@reading.ac.uk, but don't forget to let WMG have your records too!

[Ben Williams, PhD Researcher, Reading University].



And finally.....

During June, a few members of WMG and Imber Conservation Group checked the dormouse survey tubes deployed during the winter at Nockatt's Coppice (Centerparcs) and Heytesbury Wood (MOD). Although no clear evidence of dormice was found on this occasion, it's still early in the survey and we have high hopes for later in the year.

We'll revisit these sites in the autumn; watch this space!

Thank you to James Monk (Centerparcs) and Iain & Tilly (Imber Conservation Group) and all of those who helped, for supporting this work.

Forthcoming events:

Dormouse Box Monitoring:

Monthly visits are undertaken at a number of Dormouse box monitoring projects, typically contributing to the People's Trust for Endangered Species' (PTES) National Dormouse Monitoring Project (NDMP). A number of these schemes in Wiltshire are coordinated by WMG members and involve a number of group members, including providing training towards personal Dormouse licences from Natural England. There are opportunities to join a number of projects on the monthly checks, albeit when places are booked in advance. Members interested in formal training towards licences should get in touch and we'll try help where possible.

Savernake NDMP Scheme:

Contact Mark Satinet mark.satinet@o2.co.uk to book places and for details of meeting place. Meeting 10am on 21st June, 19th July, 16th August, 20th September, 18th October and 15th November.

North Wraxall NDMP Scheme:

Contact Kip D'Aucourt kip.daucourt@gmail.com to book places and for details of the meeting place. Meeting 10am on the following Sundays; 15th June, 20th July, 17th August, 21st September, 19th October, 16th November.

Group Meeting

28th July 2014

27th October

26th January 2015, all at the WWT Devizes office

Monitoring of Dormouse boxes and tubes at Nockatt's Coppice and Heytesbury Wood Both near Warminster) will be organised separately later in the season.

Watch this space: We have invited Lizzie Croose, Vincent Wildlife Trust, to Wiltshire to present the work of the Vincent Wildlife Trust national Polecat surveys. Date and venue to be confirmed watch this space for further details!

Committee contacts

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Owl Pellet Project, Paul Wexler
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