

News & Views

From the Dorset Mammal Group

Website: www.dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk

December 2019

Seasons Greetings

The View from the Chair

Now the feverish election is over, I hope that the new government will help to protect the environment and its wildlife. I've heard stories that foxes and otters are being hunted illegally in the county either under the guise of a trail hunt or hunting mink. Hunting any mammal with dogs is illegal, so if you see anything of this sort happening report it to the police.

On a happier note, in November, three of us from DMG went up to Reading University to attend the National Dormouse Conference, which was for the most part enlightening. It was good to rub shoulders with the experts and to ask questions either in the formal setting of the lecture theatre or during the breaks. I'm still experimenting with footprint tunnels, so it was good to chat with Dr Simone Bullion of Suffolk WLT, who has been using them for some time and is also one of the authors of the upcoming 3rd edition of the Dormouse Conservation Handbook.

Unfortunately, dormice are still declining according to the statistics kept by PTES who organise the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme. The reasons why vary from loss of habitat and green corridors between suitable woodland, climate change, and farming practice. We need to educate farmers to stop just flailing hedgerows every year because it ultimately destroys them and to use more conservational methods such as laying them or cutting them at

different heights every other year. This wouldn't only benefit dormice but all sort of other plants and animals and help protect the biodiversity. The UK is one of the most biodiversity damaged countries in Europe if not the world.

If we're exhorting farmers to go greener we need to do the same in our gardens, so leave wild areas

or plant wild flowers, heathers apparently contain chemicals in their nectar which help bumble bees rid themselves of internal parasites and who doesn't love bumble bees. Don't sweep up all the leaves on your lawn, they may be used by hedgehogs for nesting and they feed earthworms which feed the hedgehogs, shrews and foxes not to mention blackbirds.

We hope to have thrashed out the rewriting our constitution to apply for Charitable Incorporated Organisation status, which will make us a recognised charity. Thanks to Diana and Jo who did much of the spade work. We shall keep you informed of the process as we go.

I wish you all a wonderful Christmas and Happy New Year of mammal and other nature watching and thank you for your support through this past year.

Angela Price
- Chair DMG





Mammal Recording

Regular readers of this newsletter will know that I bang on about submitting reports of mammal sightings; the message is getting home as I am receiving more and more reports to verify - which is very pleasing.

Apart from what you might see alive, records of road casualties are also a useful source of information about which mammals are present; as are those your cat might have caught and brought home. In the latter case, this can be useful because cats catch mammals that you are not likely to see yourself in the wild. In addition, you can photograph the victim and send me the picture if you are unable to identify it and there is enough of it left.

On the subject of road casualties the main species that seem to get killed on the road are badgers, foxes, hedgehogs, squirrels and rabbits with a small number of deer, polecats and hares. Sadly, recently there has

been something of a surge in the number of otters being hit by cars though this may be because their numbers have been rising, so encounters with cars become more frequent.

Occasionally a particular site becomes a hot-spot for road kills, in which case it might be possible to persuade the Highways Department to install some mitigation, and records help us identify these places.

Don't forget, if you are unable to enter records yourself you can send details to me at records@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk giving me the species, date and location where seen and I will enter them for you.

Steve Kourik
- Dorset Mammal Recorder

Allington Hill Dormice

The Dorset Mammal Group spent an enjoyable walk through Allington Hill Woods guided by volunteers from the 'Allington Hillbillies'. The purpose of the visit was to establish if it would be a suitable site to set up a dormouse survey project.

There were three areas that looked very promising. Signs of dormice in these areas have been found by volunteer working parties over the years, such as dormouse nests. The group have been restoring hedge-lines and using dead hedging to provide instant connectivity for small mammals around the site. Last winter areas of hazel were coppiced for the first time. The group found the advice given by Angela and Stephen of the DMG invaluable, and with their help will be looking to install dormouse tubes in early spring next year.



Photo © Cathy Harvey

Contributed by Catherine Harvey

Natural Environment Team Report

Our team of ecologists have had a busy summer out and about surveying sites and buildings for all sorts of projects including bridge schemes and new schools as well as reviewing numerous planning applications to ensure wildlife and habitats are adequately protected and enhanced.

As you can imagine this keeps us pretty busy and we're delighted to have a new member joining the Natural Environment Team in January. More news about this next time!

Meanwhile, one of the many new areas that we are looking at is the government's Environmental Net Gain policy. The idea behind this is to leave biodiversity in a measurably better state than before a development. It is a complex area and has taken a few years of head scratching by Natural England and others to get to the stage where a test version of an on-line calculator has been launched. We have spent some time running a case study through the on-line calculator and we believe that once some of the bumps have been ironed out, this approach is likely to be adopted here in Dorset and across the country when a final version is launched next year.

In a nutshell, the approach aims to achieve benefits for biodiversity at every stage – design, build, operation and maintenance – of a development scheme and that these benefits are quantified. This is considered essential to help halt the overall decline in biodiversity and to sustain our society and economy. We always follow a hierarchy, which means doing everything possible to avoid losing or harming biodiversity in the first place. Where that isn't possible, we work to ensure that the necessary mitigation measures are in place. But that isn't enough and hence the need to secure a net gain for biodiversity.

What this might look like on the ground includes larger green and blue (watery) spaces and corridors that link to the wider countryside and form resilient ecological networks across the landscape that work for wildlife and nature conservation. Previously, there hasn't been a standard way to achieve this in the UK, but Biodiversity Net Gain has the potential to consistently deliver great outcomes – we'll keep you informed!

Contributed by the NET team

Could you be DMG's next Secretary?

As the Dorset Mammal Group enters a new and exciting phase as a Registered Charity (subject to the vote of the membership) we are looking for an enthusiastic and organised person to join the committee as secretary. Could you be that person?

The role provides important continuity for the charity but is not onerous.

Tasks include:

- Take and type up minutes for Committee meetings (6 per year)
- Draft agendas in consultation with the Committee
- Circulate meeting papers to the Committee
- Book meeting venues
- Prepare and circulate papers for the AGM
- Take minutes/record attendance at the AGM
- Deal with DMG's insurance policy
- Receive general enquiries via the website and respond/forward to the appropriate trustee as required

We'd love to hear from you if you are interested in joining the Committee and taking on this central role.

Contact:

Angela Price, Chairperson at chair@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk

BADGER REPORT

Vaccination Update

In the last newsletter I reported that at the first three setts vaccinated in 2019 we had been 100% successful ie. all badgers vaccinated, but that the badgers at sett 4 had disappeared. The good news is that we did eventually find them, in what had previously been a subsidiary sett, and they were duly vaccinated. Unfortunately, because we had the cameras on the old main sett we can't be certain of the numbers but we are confident that we achieved our goal of vaccinating at least 70% of the animals present.

Subsequent vaccinations went well with one notable exception. We had cameras on this sett since March because we were curious about the one male badger living there alone. Our curiosity was assuaged when, on the 2nd of May, the now female badger appeared with two cubs! We can usually determine the sex of a badger by the shape of its face but it is not always obvious and we clearly got this one wrong. At vaccination time our three badgers happily moved in and out of the traps until the first trapping night when something clearly had them spooked. The result was that we only managed to trap one cub. Subsequent videos showed a previously unseen male badger investigating the sett and, most likely, investigating the female.

One other sett of note was in my own village where I captured the video of the polecat that I hope many have seen on the DMG website. I have several videos of polecats but invariably the animal is gone in under three seconds. On this occasion, however, it stayed in the frame for a good 30 seconds and a second animal stayed even longer. Also of interest at this sett is that one of the cubs vaccinated had only one eye but this didn't seem to impede its behaviour. That said, we know that 50% of cubs don't survive their first year and I have left a camera on the sett so I can follow this cub's progress throughout the winter.

In summary, this was a good year for vaccinations. Although we vaccinated fewer animals than last year the numbers were well within the normal population fluctuations. We also added one new farm to the list (the three badgers mentioned above) and we have been approached with a view to vaccinating next year on a one thousand acre estate in the south of the county.

The last two years have been hard work recovering from the loss of vaccine in 2016/2017 but we are still here and plan to be here when the Government finally accepts that culling badgers is a terrible mistake.



The Badger Cull

This year's main badger culls ie. those in the first four years of the cull programme, finished on Sunday 27th of October. This accounts for almost the whole of Dorset except for the North zone which, in year five, is now subject to supplementary culling and will, next year, be joined by the West zone. Disgracefully, the supplementary culls can continue until 31st of January despite, as I have pointed out before in these pages, 20% of cubs being born in January. Our Government considers it humane that cubs are left to starve underground when their mothers have been shot.

Perhaps, not surprisingly, some of those sad people who enjoy killing animals have taken the badger culls as open season to kill what and where they choose. Readers may remember that last year we found snares set to catch badgers on the Drax Estate in the east of the county and this year the Somerset Badger Group have already found 15 snares. Regrettably, free running snares (as opposed to locking snares) are not illegal in this country but it is illegal to intentionally set a snare to catch a badger. Readers wanting to know more about snares and the campaign to have them banned can find more details on www.snarewatch.org. It is not always pleasant reading but we must not close our eyes to the horrible things that happen in the countryside, often in our name.

As in previous years we now wait for the Government to release the annual cull figures. It will be interesting to see if once again they change the target the week before the cull ends and then claim total success.

Badger Rescue

On a more positive note, on Saturday 16th November, two of us attended a one day 'Badger Rescue Course' at Secret World in Somerset (if you don't know Secret World do look them up at www.secretworld.org). I've taken a number of rescued animals there in the past and I know they are always assured of the best possible care and attention. The goal is always to return them to their home range as quickly as possible but sometimes the animal cannot be returned to the wild and will then remain at Secret World.



The course was run by three friends from the Somerset Badger Group who, between them, have considerable experience of badger rescues. Thus far I've been lucky and the rescues I've carried out have been quite straightforward but I now know how to get a badger out of a seventy-five cm square, two metre deep hole (don't try this at home) or from a drainage ditch or from a one foot gap between two buildings. Interestingly, badgers are relatively calm animals, much easier to deal with than foxes, but they do have an incredibly powerful bite so, with the exception of very small cubs, should not be approached by anyone who hasn't had the requisite training.

I also learned from a friend that her sister-in-law, who is Norwegian, is frightened of badgers and afraid that they will come at night and drag her away! Apparently, this is a common fear in Norway. I wonder if other nationalities

have similar superstitions.

The Ecology of Badgers

Looking back through previous DMG badger reports I see that in December 2017 I mentioned that I was putting together a talk on '**The Ecology of Badgers**' but I couldn't see anywhere that I had reported it as being ready. In fact, it has now been delivered in several venues, including as far afield as Cumbria, and thus far it has been very well received. One group thought it might be too controversial but that is simply not the case.

If any of you do belong to other groups, who would like to learn more about the UK's largest carnivore, the talk is free and all I need is a screen and a power source. You can contact me at badgers@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk.

Ian Mortimer

Quick Mammal Quiz

1. Where in Dorset can you see a statue of a five- legged deer?
2. Which mammal, no longer found in Dorset, indirectly brought the bubonic plague to Britain in 1348?
3. Which is the largest rodent found in Britain?
4. Which is the smallest terrestrial mammal found in Dorset, indeed in Britain?
5. Which is the largest native mammal found, occasionally, in Dorset?

Answers on Page 10.



The DMG Dorset Hedgehog Project

It has been estimated that during the 1950s the UK hedgehog population was around 30,000,000. Recently the Mammal Society has put the current population figure at just over 500,000.

The Dorset Mammal Group is aiming to reverse the decline of the hedgehog population in Dorset with a six-point campaign.

Hedgehog Friendly Towns and Villages

We are aiming to develop towns and villages into hedgehog friendly habitats. Currently twenty-nine villages are signed up.

Education

Raising public awareness with a range of visual presentations, and producing literature and media articles.

Training

DMG organised a training day for Dorset town and council groundsmen and heavily subsidised 60 delegates to attend the Vale Wildlife Hospital course in care and welfare for hedgehogs here in Dorset.

Research

Research by collecting data to establish the most common causes for hedgehogs requiring veterinary help.

Keeping up with latest international scientific research into the decline of the species.

Hedgehog Rescuers

Maintaining and supporting a network of hedgehog rescuers, carers, rehabilitators and hedgehog friendly vets across Dorset.

Hedgehog Hospital

A business plan has been written with a view to developing a hedgehog hospital in central Dorset. Phase 1 of the plan has been accepted by the committee.

Susy Varndell

The Dorset Hedgehog Conference

Working Together to Help Hedgehogs

Saturday 4 April 2020, 9.45am to 4.15pm

The Dorford Centre, Dorchester, Dorset

In response to the steep decline in the UK's hedgehog population, especially in the last 20 years, the Dorset Mammal Group (DMG) is pioneering a successful approach to hedgehog conservation in Dorset, which co-ordinates community action, skilled hedgehog rescuers and veterinary practices. DMG will be sharing this strategy and placing it in the national scientific context of hedgehog decline at a conference on Saturday 4 April 2020 in Dorchester, Dorset.

Speakers will include:

Dr Nigel Reeve, a leading ecologist, who has studied hedgehogs for over 40 years. Nigel will be talking about the Regents Park study and the research projects into hedgehogs across Europe.

Hugh Warwick, a well-known hedgehog champion and a lively speaker. Hugh has written no less than three books on hedgehogs and will be talking about his work with the species in Oxfordshire.

Colin Varndell, a professional wildlife photographer who has been working with hedgehogs for the past four years, will be showing extracts from his thought-provoking, high impact visual presentation *The Hedgehog Predicament*. Delegates will learn much about the natural history of hedgehogs and conservation strategies in Dorset and beyond.

Speakers from Dorset, include **Susy Varndell**, DMG's hedgehog lead; and representatives from local communities; the rescue network; and Dorset Council's Natural Environment Team who oversee wildlife mitigation in planning applications.

Susy will give an overview of the co-ordinated six point hedgehog conservation strategy which includes establishing co-ordinators in 27 hedgehog friendly towns and villages (to date); public education; a network of hedgehog rescues; and vets training for hedgehog rescues; and vets keeping up with the latest research and working towards establishing a hedgehog hospital in central Dorset.

Conference Fee: £25:00

Booking via Eventbrite

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-dorset-hedgehog-conference-tickets-79701925605>

or email

hedgehogs@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk

for booking details.



Report from the latest Hedgehog Friendly Town - Upton

I'd never really seen a hedgehog, but that all changed when I moved to Upton six years ago. Now I see them visiting our garden every night between February till early December. Once I counted eight individuals munching, huffing and sniffing in our garden, with one waking over my foot! It was a night to remember!

I thought I had Upton's best-kept secret, but after working at the local library and talking with locals I realised Upton was a hedgehog hotspot!

After seeing Colin's brilliant hedgehog spread in the Dorset Life magazine, I found out about the DMG - 'Hedgehog Friendly Towns & Villages' project and thought Upton needs to sign up!

I formed a hedgehog partnership with Sarah-Jane who moved to Upton a year ago. SJ discovered she had hedgehog visitors too when she discovered one sleeping in a roll of carpet in their garden! This one was named Carpetto, I thought Aladdin would have suited!

So far we have been overjoyed by how many people have turned up to both our meetings. The people of Upton are very passionate about their spiky visitors and eager to find out more. They want to help Upton's hedgehog population and to spread the word in the community.

So far we have had meetings with the Town Council to discuss road signs and to encourage them to stop using



slug pellets (we will win!). We have informed our group on what to feed hedgehogs, what to do if they find an injured one etc. We have also started recording sightings and road deaths. In the new year we really want to promote wildlife friendly gardening and to engage with the local schools.

Thank you to Susy & Colin for such a fantastic project that we are so pleased and proud to be part of! We look forward to meeting with other co-ordinators.

***Contributed by Sarah & SJ
- Upton Hedgehog Friendly Town Coordinators***

A Nocturnal Hedgehog Adventure!

I had a call late one evening recently about a very small hedgehog in Winterbourne Zelston, less than 200 grams so I said I would go and collect it with a heat pad etc.

When I got to the A31 it was closed! There is no other way to get there so I went and found a workman and explained the problem. He was a bit reluctant but said they would find me an escort. I had to wait, but a vehicle then arrived with yellow flashing lights and it escorted me the 5 miles to the village with hazard lights and all the nonsense. It waited for me and when I returned to the start I had to stop so that they could see the hedgehog and a photo taken 'to show my wife!' I have since collected another from the same address! I collected two from Langton Long yesterday, goodness knows where they got my number! Very posh house!!

They are keeping coming, it's a bit hectic.

Contributed by Sue Aldous

Blandford Forum - Hedgehog Friendly Town

Well, where to begin, it's been a pretty busy time for us here in Blandford, apologies as this might be rather a long piece.

We were invited to go to the Sustainability Fair in Angus Woods on Sunday 18th August by Sylvia Andrews of the Blandford Museum. We borrowed the DMG gazebo and our chairman Angela came along and had her microscope and mammal skulls and we had a DMG display with children's activities. The day was good in making contacts and spreading the word about the 'Hedgehog Predicament' and DMG's work.

We had been approached by Joanna Miller of Humberts who wanted to help promote and champion our (DMG) cause for the hedgehog using their coffee mornings in the many towns and villages throughout Dorset. It will be good to see where this takes us, perhaps a rich benefactor for our Hedgehog Hospital or is that just wishful thinking!

Denise placed an article in the October issue of 'The Bridge' parish magazine for Sturminster Marshall and surrounding areas about all the hedgehogs that she has caught on camera trap there. Many sightings, during May and June, of a pregnant female, but unfortunately didn't get to see any hoglets. Denise has asked for others that are seeing hogs to get in touch, but to date no-one has.

Blandford Hedgehog Extravaganza planning for Saturday 31 August had to be moved to Saturday 5 October as building works on Woodhouse Gardens Pavilion over-ran. Denise and Michelle spent some time distributing and advertising and organising the event, plus canvassing local businesses for raffle prizes. We had a lovely sunny day and fantastic help from other co-ordinators, hedgehog carers, Humberts, Morrisons, Susy and Colin and lots of lovely volunteers from our Blandford group. All the hard work and stress was worth it as we raised

over £600 profit which will go to purchasing some of the robust road signs for Blandford, support for the hedgehog carers and towards our vision of a 'Hedgehog Hospital'. The raffle was well supported and Nicci Brown from Forum Focus took photographs and we appeared in the Forum Focus November issue and also the Blackmore Vale Magazine.

We had tremendous support from local businesses donating raffle prizes and many cakes from DMG members, co-ordinators, hedgehog carers and friends – I'm not sure I've mentioned everyone but a big THANK YOU to all you wonderful people who helped make the day so successful. We made lots of contacts who wanted to join our Blandford group who have now been contacted by email.

At the Hedgehog Extravaganza we met Jane Thorp, from Blandford Library, who asked if we could do a 15 minute talk/presentation for young children on hedgehogs during October half term. Denise agreed and on the morning of Tuesday 29th October the event took place. It went well and Denise ended the session with a short video of the female hedgehog at Sturminster Marshall. It was well received and the 'little' people and their parents enjoyed it.

We posted the DMG 'Bonfire Aware' posters around Blandford and managed to get a very small piece in the Blackmore Vale magazine just before bonfire night. Denise now has a contact at BVM who has visiting hogs and Denise has advised her on feeding. She is keen to see some articles on hedgehogs published on a regular basis.

Recently Denise was contacted by someone in Durweston who had 3 small juveniles in a bothy and was uncertain what to do. They had been putting out cat food and one that had been weighed was just over 300g. Denise spoke to Karen Foster about them and met with

the couple and the 3 hogs are now in Karen's care. The couple are keen to become hedgehog fosterers so should be in contact with Susy soon.

***Contributed by Denise Montague
- Blandford Hedgehog Friendly
Town Co-ordinator***

What amazing work you did Denise. A big thank you from us all.

Susy



Photo © Nicci Brown

‘Making Blandford Special’ Event

On the morning of Saturday 19th October, Denise (Blandford Co-ordinator), Jo (Pimperne Co-ordinator) and Donna (Charlton Marshall Co-ordinator) attended the ‘Making Blandford Special’ event, as DMG’s Hedgehog Friendly Towns and Villages project had been ‘nominated’ as one of 80 local grass roots activities.

Co-ordinated by Blandford Food Bank, Faithworks Wessex, Hall & Woodhouse, Dorset County Council, Skills & Learning and Noc’s Box, the event was an opportunity to, ‘discover more about what makes our community a great place to live so that we can celebrate the good ideas and inspire others around Blandford to do the same’.

Over 75 organisations, mostly voluntary, were represented within four main categories:

Community clubs

Our town (this included ‘environmental’ groups – we were alongside Angus Wood Environmental Trust and Clean up Blandford)

Shared Life Circumstances

Shared Life Interests

The Mayor of Blandford and the High Sheriff were also in attendance.

With so many organisations represented and participating on the day we weren’t allocated specific ‘airtime’ as we had hoped, but Denise pluckily took the initiative and grabbed a few seconds on the microphone to mention the project!

Denise had also set up an information point with lots of leaflets and the Blandford hedgehog sightings map. Our presence generated various positive conversations with interested people during the morning and certainly raised awareness amongst the attendees.

After we heard about some of the inspirational work being done locally across the four categories, each table identified some key local issues, and tried to generate some low-cost solutions. Our group listed transport, advertising, litter and keeping village identities. Obviously transport and litter have a particular impact on our hedgehog populations. In addition we feel a side benefit of the DMG’s project is to bring people together for a meaningful cause; doing something positive for our local environment and reducing social isolation.

Other areas discussed were existing means of sharing information (web sites and media), which we can use to promote hedgehog events; and getting businesses to play more of a part in the community. The local library is also keen to have a couple of hedgehog sessions for local school children and Denise will be speaking more to them.

It was really inspiring to be part of the start of a local initiative, with lots of networking opportunities.

We plan to update on progress as it impacts the DMG Dorset Hedgehog Project.

**With thanks to Jo Gilmore
- Pimperne Hedgehog Co-ordinator**



Quick Mammal Quiz Answers

1. On top of the Stag Gate to the Charlborough Park (Drax) Estate beside the A37 road near Wimborne.
2. The Black Rat (*Rattus rattus*).
3. Eurasian Beaver, (*Castor fiber*).
4. Pygmy Shrew (*Sorex minutus*).
5. Red Deer (*Cervus elaphus*).

Quiz contributed by Steve Kourik

Otter Section Report

Autumn Survey 2019

The weather during the Autumn survey really did not help surveyors, as most signs were washed away with river levels very high across the Dorset catchment.

65 surveying forms were sent out and many thanks to the 43 surveyors - which consisted of members and non-members - who completed the Autumn DMG Otter and Water Vole Survey.

Blandford Forum revealed daytime sightings of Otters (mother and three cubs), and we had other sightings in East Dorset. Photo evidence and site information was gathered for the Site Library.

Sadly, we lost the dog otter at Blandford due to a Road Traffic Accident (RTA) on the Blandford bypass. With special thanks to local residents Ian and Terry who contacted Graham Stanley the Senior Ranger for North Dorset who collected and delivered the deceased otter to



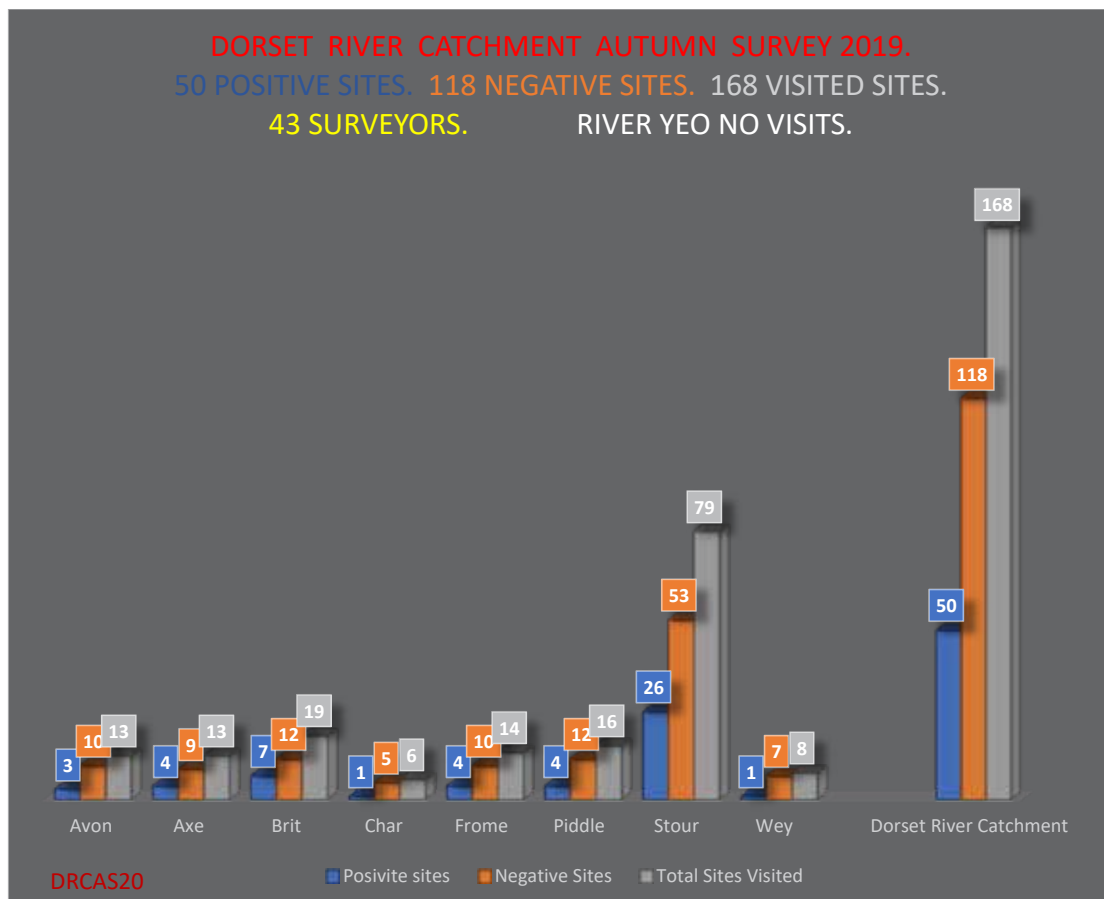
the local Environment Agency.

Although otter sightings were encouraging, water vole recordings were down across the Dorset catchment. Mink are still present in the county and are quite possibly responsible for these very low recordings.

With regard to the otter at Wimborne, who unfortunately had a cable tie around its neck, this has not been resolved despite various valiant attempts from different groups. For example, the UK Wild Otter Trust travelling from Devon several times; the RSPCA; and Monkey World. This went on for many weeks and different techniques were tried. I, DMG members and some

non-members attended over this period to assist and DMG member Paul Turton put in a lot of hours co-ordinating sightings and organising volunteers to assist.

I found many local people in Wimborne were concerned and helpful, as were those at the Dean Estate who provided access to their land; and thanks go to Cllr Ms Carol Butter of the local council arranging hot drinks and equipment. Unfortunately, we have not been informed of any recent sightings and the outcome is unknown.



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In 2019 we have sadly lost 15 otter due to road traffic accidents in the Dorset catchment area. If you find a dead otter please ring the number below:

Environment Agency 03708 506506

and ask for your nearest Conservation or Biodiversity Officer. You will be asked for the location of the otter and some basic information.

Date for the Diary

The next DMG Otter & Water Vole Survey will be on

Saturday 25th April

and

Sunday 26th April 2020.

Please register your interest via Email

at surveyotter@btinternet.com

With grateful thanks to all who contributed to our Dorset Otters in 2019 let us look forward to a successful 2020.

Wishing you all a very Happy Christmas.

Ken Hutchinson

- DMG Otter & Water Vole Co-ordinator

Otter Surveyor Reveals All

I have five areas that I survey each year for the Otter Section of DMG which I tend to do on a weekday as it is generally more busy over a weekend. This autumn I split the survey over Wed 2 and Thurs 3 October. I started early on Wednesday morning and visited sites at Charlton Marshall, Crawford Bridge, Shapwick and Spetisbury. It was a lovely sunny day but the river was very high due to the recent rain. There was lots of vegetation so many signs that might have been visible were not. I did not get any visual sightings of otters at any of these sites but saw a multitude of lovely birds. Lots of mute swans, reed warblers, grey herons, swallows, little egrets, kingfisher and just one shoveler, distinguished by its extraordinary bill.

On the Thursday I tackled Stour Meadows, it was a bit colder and cloudier than Wednesday. I did my usual tour of the pond, under the bypass bridge and along the river bank checking under the trees trying to get as close as I could to the river. Again the river was so high with lots of vegetation that no usual signs were visible. However

I did meet with one of the photographers, Terry, under the bypass bridge, who told me he'd been photographing otters just that week and had also seen two mink. I continued with my survey and eventually ended up just down from the blue bridge. There was a lovely grey heron preening itself on the tree trunk across the river and there in front of me was a female otter with cubs. I stood with photographers Terry and Ian for some 40 minutes watching this mum with her 3 cubs although 1 cub was quite shy and spent most of its time hiding on the opposite bank of the river. As I finished my survey I met a lovely lady who had come here just to see and photograph the otters. I introduced her to Ian and Terry but the otters had retreated to sleep off their meal. She stayed for a while and made plans to come back later and the next morning and I am sure she managed to get her photographs. This is the first otter survey I've done and actually seen otters, it's usually just spraint, anal jelly and paw prints!

**Contributed by Denise Montague
DMG, Member No 185**

Photos © Denise Montague



Ken Hutchinson DMG Otter Co-ordinator comments on Denise's Survey: Denise has been surveying for some years on her local sites usually with her friend Heather, and regularly sends in photo evidence and signs of any wildlife spotted.

As we are all aware the weather conditions this Autumn were very wet and the river levels were high, but Denise was rewarded with her first Otter sighting of a Mother and three cubs during her Autumn survey. Just wonderful and well deserved.

The Real Criminals

Seasonal Greetings All!

As you know from my previous posts I have been away from work as a WCO because of injury. Glad to say I've got a reconstructed knee and nearly through my rehab to get me back to full time operational duty.

Prior to surgery I had dealings with a report of the destruction of a bat roost in my usual patch of North Dorset. Most cases of this type are relatively easy to prove, and usually down to greed by the landowner. I conducted my investigation, had early CPS advice in order to tie things together then handed the enquiry over for finalisation with one of my WCO colleagues as I went off to surgery.

The offender pleaded guilty early on after he had decided to tear down a log store to make way for an extension and completely disregarding advice from an ecologist that a full survey would be needed as evidence of (Natterers) bats were found. The male from Motcombe, was fined £3000 together with costs of £425. A Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) confiscation order was made and a further £3720 was gained, this money is divided up between various agencies including the police and the Bat Conservation Trust. It is one of the largest fines nationally in recent times.

If you have bats living near you they are wondrous to see flying, equally if you need or want to do work on your property, be responsible and get a survey carried out and follow the legal process if evidence of bats is found.

As you can imagine sitting about with a sore knee (then getting a pulmonary embolism!) can be quite frustrating but sitting in the garden during the summer watching the birds and animal visitors is rewarding, one visitor turned out not to be a neighbour's cat, but one of the many feral

cats that roam our countryside. Now, as many cat owners will testify, these feline partners often bring home gifts, often frogs, small birds and mammals to show us their hunting prowess. The feral kind not only look around our gardens for easy meals but in contrast to our pets, their diet is mainly those 'gifts' our pets bring. Research shows there to be in excess of a million feral cats in the UK, they have a life-span between 2 – 5 years and often live in colonies. They are no doubt a real threat to our wildlife, cute as they may appear they still retain and have that killer instinct.

My particular friend refused to be tamed, and succumbed to illness – I then had to take her to the vet to be put down.

This leads to another problem, in that these cats are often teeming with parasites, can carry diseases both harmful to us and to our pets, this one likely died from FIV (feline aids). The answer is neutering. Cats Protection have run a TNR scheme (trap, neuter and return) for a while and this is likely to be a long term solution that may not be sustainable, as a million cats is a huge number.

If you come across a feral cat wear gloves - although it likely won't come near - unlike a stray, which will. Until it is clear which type is sitting in your garden looking at your bird feeders, licking its lips and looking like butter won't melt, remember it's an animal at heart and will pounce. Give it some words of encouragement to disrupt its naughty activities.

Lastly, remember to lock any outbuildings to deter unwelcome human visitors; call 101 or 999 if a crime is in progress. Have a safe Christmas and New Year.

***Contributed by PC 740 Rob Hammond
- North Dorset NPT/WCO***

Photo © Rob Hammond



WANTED

Mammal stories and photos from DMG members. It would be good to see more use of the DMG Newsletter by members. Please send any mammal related stories or accounts from home or away to colin_varndell@hotmail.com. It doesn't matter how short pieces are.

Also, if you have any mammal photos, it would be good to see those too. Send in photos as JPEG attachments, not embedded into emails.

Thank you, Ed

Mauritius

Mauritius is a country without any mammals. To be more accurate, it has no indigenous terrestrial mammals, and I found that strange, if not eerie, when I visited a couple of months ago.

Mauritius is the peak of an enormous volcanic chain that emerged from the sea 8 million years ago, to the east of the African mainland and 700 miles east of Madagascar. So there was never an opportunity for ground-living mammals to get there. It was visited by Arab, Portuguese and Dutch sailors, but it remained uninhabited until the French took it over in 1715 and then the British in 1810, using slave and convict labour to establish a viable colony. With the ships arrived rats; mongooses were introduced from India in the late 19th century to control the rats; wild pigs and Java deer were introduced as food for the colonists; and macaque monkeys are now common in certain places too. But there are no indigenous mammals . . .

. . . except one: the wonderful **Mauritius fruit bat** or **Mauritian flying fox, *Pteropus niger***. It was dusk and my daughter and I were walking along a lane towards our hire car after a few hours on the beach, when I spotted somebody looking up and pointing. I followed their gaze and there they were; two huge bats flying around between the tops of the mango trees, stopping to eat and flying around again, a magnificent sight. We

saw some again a few days later when we were driving home from the mountains, hanging from telegraph wires, strung out along the lane. They are endemic to Mauritius.



Apart from the excitement of seeing the bats, I found the absence of native mammals disturbing. There were no muddy runs down the banks at the sides of the road, no gaps where mammals had squeezed through leaving tufts of fur, no scratched soil where claws had searched for food, no scats, no flattened grass, no little holes in the ground, no raptors hunting for prey, no walking along a path knowing lots of little pairs of eyes and ears are tracking you. I got to thinking how awful it would be if Britain had no native wild mammal species.

Contributed by Anthea Anderson

Glossary

Indigenous species or native species are those present in an ecosystem as the result only of natural processes, with no human intervention. They may or may not also be endemic.

Endemic species are those that exist only in one geographical region. The region can be large or small; species can be endemic to a continent, part of a continent, or a single island.

Photo © Anthea Anderson

Hedgehog Heroes!

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust has been calling for Hedgehog Heroes to help save Britain's hedgehogs.

With hedgehog populations having decreased by more than 30% over the last 10 years, most likely due to habitat fragmentation and the use of pesticides, there is now estimated to be less than 1 million left in the UK. Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's Hedgehog Hero campaign aims to turn this around.

Launched in July, the campaign now has 2,500 citizen scientists signed up, who have reported an amazing 2,100 sightings of hedgehogs in Wiltshire.

Each Hedgehog Hero receives weekly newsletters, containing hedgehog facts and information about how to care for them, including what to feed them, how to make gardens more hedgehog friendly and how to build a hedgehog house. A hedgehog house competition called 'Give a Hog a Home' was also run to encourage the creation of hedgehog homes in gardens across Wiltshire.

The response to the campaign has been incredible, and it will return with the hedgehogs in Spring 2020 to record yet more sightings of hedgehogs in the county.

The aim of the Hedgehog Hero campaign is to create a map of hedgehog populations in the county, in order to understand where conservation efforts should be focused for the species. It collects data about hedgehogs from each sighting submitted, including comments on their behaviours as well as photographs and videos. This data will then be collated and used to write a report which will be published in the New Year, focusing on the overall health of Wiltshire's hedgehogs.

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust are asking everyone to join the campaign and become a Hedgehog Hero.

To find out more, visit www.wiltshire-wildlife.org/hedgehog

*Contributed by Eleanor Dodson
- Wiltshire Wildlife Trust*

Current Status of Beavers in Great Britain

Beaver reintroduction in Great Britain is a devolved matter. As such, the status of beavers in Scotland, England and Wales is devolved to each respective government and reintroduction is at differing stages across these nations.

To note, this study refers to Great Britain rather than the United Kingdom as there currently is no known evidence of beavers ever having been present in Northern Ireland (or the Republic of Ireland). As such, no beaver introduction projects are due to take place there.

- **SCOTLAND:** As of May 2019, the Eurasian beaver is now protected in Scotland as a European Protected Species and the beavers currently present in Scotland will be allowed to expand their range naturally. The Scottish government have developed a Management Framework, details of which are available at the following link: <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/safeguarding-protected-areas-and-species/protected-species/protected-species-z-guide/protected-species-beaver/management>
- **ENGLAND:** The 'River Otter Beaver Trial' is a licenced five year reintroduction trial taking place in Devon. This is due to conclude in 2020 and, following this, the UK government is due to make a decision upon the future of beavers in England. There are also a number of fenced projects across the country, including in Cornwall, Yorkshire and Essex amongst others. At present, a licence is required for a beaver project. Details of the 'River Otter Beaver Trial' are available at following link: <https://www.devonwildlifetrust.org/what-we-do/our-projects/river-otter-beaver-trial>
- **WALES:** Currently beavers are not recognised as resident in Wales and there are no officially recognised beaver reintroduction trials. There are attempts being made to establish a trial, most notably by the 'Welsh Beaver Project'. Details are available at the following link: <https://www.welshbeaverproject.org/>

Outcome 1

A paper was written on this research that has successfully passed the scientific peer review process. This is where experts within the field critically review a study to ensure that robust and impartial methods are used to develop objective findings. This has subsequently been published by the Royal Geographical Society's journal AREA and the paper is available to view for free online at <https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12576>

The paper used results from the questionnaire to highlight that, in wildlife reintroduction, an understanding of the social aspects of a project will

need to identify key stakeholders' attitudes and the ways in which people are engaged, but that emphasis should be placed upon moving beyond this to understand attitudes towards legal protection, management responsibilities and management techniques if potential conflicts that may arise are to be reduced should a reintroduction project go ahead.

A number of the results related to these areas are also presented in this paper. Further results will be presented as a part of outcome 3 (see below).

Outcome 2

This study was conducted as part of a fixed term Research Assistant contract. As a result of this work, further research areas were identified which are now being explored in a number of more focused studies within the scope of a PhD, which is now in its second year. This includes a number of studies within the scope of the 'River Otter Beaver Trial' and will be reported upon as a part of the Science & Evidence report (referenced below in Outcome 3).

Outcome 3

The 'River Otter Beaver Trial' is due to come to a close in 2020. Work is underway on producing a report on the science and the evidence that has been gathered across the course of the trial. This will be submitted to the UK Government to consider in its decision-making process on the future of beavers in England. It is intended that this document will be openly accessible for the public to be able to read.

Results including those described in outcome 1, further results from the questionnaire (including the reasons respondents gave for their answers and breakdowns of attitudes by occupation) and further research undertaken as part of outcome 2 will be provided in this report. This will be alongside research undertaken by various project partners on the impacts of beavers in a range of research areas throughout the trial period. This will include a number of online appendices that will delve more deeply into the questionnaire results, and the paper described in outcome 1 will also be attached as an appendix.

It is intended that this document will be available in early 2020 for the public to access. As we stated that you would only receive one email from us I am afraid that I will be unable to email this directly to you, however it will be publicly available online. Therefore, please keep your eyes peeled for this to become available, likely through Devon Wildlife Trust and the University of Exeter.

Steve obtained permission for this to be used in the DMG newsletter by email

Roger Auster



Dates for your Diary

Consult the DMG website to see the final details of all the events (as they become available)

Thurs 6th January	The Hedgehog Predicament, Piddletrenthide 2:30pm
Wed 12th February	Swanage's first hedgehog friendly meeting
Mon 17th February	Portesham's second hedgehog friendly meeting
Thurs 12th March	Winterborne Kingston's first hedgehog friendly meeting
Thurs 2nd April	The Ecology of Badgers, Friends of the Millennium Green, Bridport
Sat 4th April	Hedgehog Conference, Dorford Centre, Dorchester
Wed 15th April	The Ecology of Badgers, Church Hall, Digby Road, Sherborne DWT North
Sat 25th & Sun 26th April	Otter & Water Vole Survey. Please register your interest via Email at surveyotter@btinternet.com

Dorset Mammal Group Committee 2018/19

Chairperson	Angela Price	chair@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk
Treasurer	Mel Elliott	treasurer@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk
Secretary	Vacancy	secretary@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk
Membership	Mel Elliott	membership@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk
Events	Susy Varndell	events@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk
Badger Section Leader	Ian Mortimer	badgers@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk
Otter Section Leader	Ken Hutchinson	otters@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk
Hedgehog Section Leader	Susy Varndell	hedgehogs@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk
Social Media & Website Leader	Rachel Moors	media@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk
Mammal Recorder	Steve Kourik	records@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk
Dormouse Section Leader	Susy Varndell	hedgehogs@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk
Dorset Mammal Atlas Leader	Angela Price	
Without Portfolio	Jo Morland	
Without Portfolio	Diana Maxwell	

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