

Devon's mammals – the fast furry facts

Devon is special for Greater Horseshoe Bats, Otters, Dormice, and, more recently, wild Beavers

A Batty comment

The largest population of Greater Horseshoe Bats in the UK, and possibly Europe, lives in south Devon across an archipelago of cave sites, part of the internationally designated South Hams SAC. The Devon GHB Project has worked with landowners to manage bat hibernating, roosting and foraging habitats, and to raise awareness amongst local people <http://devonbatproject.org/>

Other bats in Devon include some of the UK's rarest breeding species. Grey Long-eared Bat is the focus of one of the Back from the Brink projects. Lesser Horseshoe Bats are widespread, with an unusual urban hibernation site in the centre of Exeter. There are also Bechstein's, Barbastelle, and Nathusius' Pipistrelle bats. Leisler's bats are on the western edge of their range in Devon. Could Alcaethoe's bat be here?

And an Otter thing

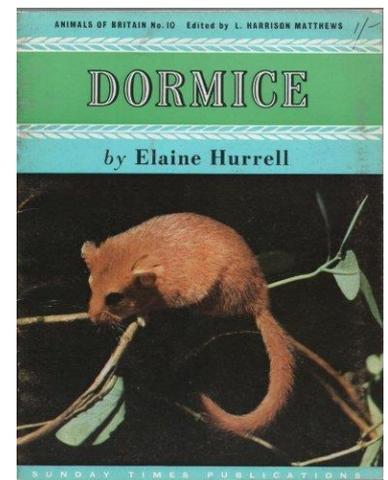
The south west is a national stronghold, where otters remained throughout the national decline 1960s-1990s. Devon is the place of Henry Williamson's Tarka and Miriam Darlington's *Otter Country*.

Otters are present on every river catchment in the county, including many of same rivers and local landmarks used by Tarka which can still be seen today.

No places offer guaranteed sightings, but in east Devon there is a certain weir on the River Otter between the towns of Otterton and Ottery St Mary

In a nutshell

Dormice are widespread in Devon's interlinked network of hedges, small fields and woods. HG Hurrell and daughter Elaine made the discovery that hazel nuts are nibbled open in a distinctive way – and hence could be used as a survey method – at their home Moorgate on Dartmoor, a hallowed location for local dormouse and county mammal studies. This may be where one of the oldest continuously used dormouse boxes is located, in place since 1960s. There are around 90 dormouse nestbox monitoring sites in the county, of which approximately 60 are regularly active. The University of Exeter has hosted several recent dormouse PhD studies.



New kits on the block

A new arrival is the population of wild-living Beavers on the River Otter in east Devon, discovered – or officially recognised – in 2014, now part of a Devon Wildlife Trust project as part of a licensed trial. They are breeding and there are 4-5 family groups, around Otterton, Tipton St John, to just north of Honiton and into the Blackdown Hills AONB.

In other county mammal news ...

Badgers are common and can sometimes be seen in urban areas. Polecats are starting to colonise the county, with a high number of records of hybrids, and increasingly of true polecats.

Red Deer are an iconic sight on Exmoor and in north Devon, and there are melanistic Fallow Deer in the Teign Valley. Roe deer are very common. Muntjac and Sika are starting to colonise, but distributions are not known.

North Devon is an important stopping off point for Grey Seals moving between South Wales and North Cornwall.

Many species of dolphins and whales are seen in the seas around the county. North Devon has good populations of Harbour Porpoise, while Lyme Bay is important for White-beaked Dolphins.

Missing and mystery mammals

The current county status of Hedgehogs, Water Shrew, and Harvest Mouse are unknown. Devon Mammals Group's Harvest Mouse survey project has tried to find out more ([link](#)).

Water voles are rare in Devon. They have been reintroduced to sites in East Devon and Teignbridge. Yellow-necked Mice have never been recorded and are absent from the county – so far as we know.

Secretive Wild Boar are suspected to be present, and there have been suggested, not fully confirmed, exceptional reports of Pine Marten.