



Devon Mammal Group

October 2022 Newsletter

www.devonmammalgroup.org

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Chair's Chat

Welcome to the Autumn 2022 edition of the Devon Mammal Group Newsletter. The committee and I hope that you are all well and have enjoyed the summer.

I have to admit that I am happy that temperatures have dropped a little, and the countryside is green again.

At this time of year, our wildlife is preparing for the winter by foraging more frequently. We can all help to give our native species the best chance of survival, by delaying the cutting back of fruit- and nut-bearing scrub, hedgerows and trees until masting is complete (towards the end of Autumn). Allowing fallen fruit, seeds, and nuts to remain on the ground and creating leaf litter piles within your gardens, offers additional foraging and shelter for small mammals, including voles, hedgehogs, badgers and wood mice.

Our fantastic committee will be busy organising a programme of talks for the coming months, so please keep an eye out for emails and updates on social media and on our website.

Most of our speakers kindly give their time for free, so your support and attendance in person or online is greatly appreciated.

Please feel free to send us your mammal-encounter stories. We love hearing from you and would like to share some of your experiences in the newsletter, if you are happy for us to do so.

Best wishes

Helen (DMG Chair)

We are still giving Small Grants!

We are still giving small grants to our members, to assist with any research or citizen science projects they might like to carry out. Why not go to our website and find out if you are eligible.

<http://devonmammalgroup.org/small-grants-scheme.html>

Grants of up to £500 can be awarded to help cover research costs i.e. cameras, traps and other equipment.

To obtain a Grant, the application form should be completed and sent to the DMG Committee for approval. We are keen to encourage applications from our members and will look especially favourably on unusual applications. You do not have to be a student to obtain a grant. In return for funding, recipients will be asked to provide an article for our Newsletter and Website and/or to provide a short talk at one of our events. Our members love to hear about new research!

If you would like to apply for a grant, please contact: charlymead91@gmail.com





Otter musings from Ellie Knott

"Surely Otters won't be in this tiny stream?" This has been said to me several times when I've been doing Otter surveys for the **English Otter Survey**. Usually though, I've been able to find spraint, even on the tiniest streams. Otters can be found on the small watercourses, though they are more likely to be using them to travel. Some streams are very shallow, or very muddy, or have culverts, but the Otters still use them.



Tiny stream

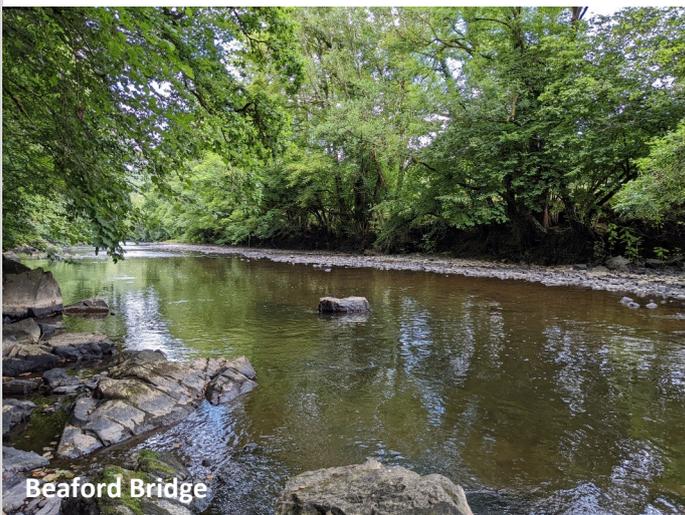
I've found Otter spraint in some unusual places, where you wouldn't expect to find Otters. My favourite is the weir in the centre of Sidmouth. There's a fairly busy ford just upstream of the weir, with cars driving across regularly. Downstream, the river is canalised, with steep-sided banks, and doesn't look very Otter-friendly. But I found lots of



Spraint on Sidmouth weir



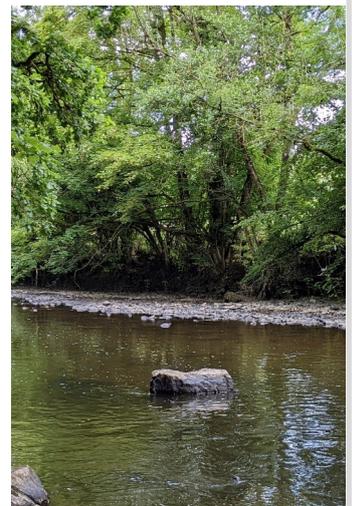
Sidmouth Weir



Beaford Bridge

spraint on the concrete ledges either side of the weir, so they are obviously using the river.

Sometimes Otter spraint sites stand out, such as a rock in the middle of the River Torridge at Beaford Bridge. The banks are very rocky, so you would have thought that there are lots of potential spraint sites, but they use a rock mid-channel, as that stands out .





Collard Bridge



Other times they pick a very non-obvious rock on a shingle bar. Why that one? On the larger rivers you can find spraint at water level and at the top of the bank - covering all bases. At Collard Bridge, on the River Yeo near Chelfham I found spraint at water level and on all of the reinforcement blocks under the bridge, up to nearly two metres high.

I often find spraint on the banks of the Exeter Canal, just under the road bridge.

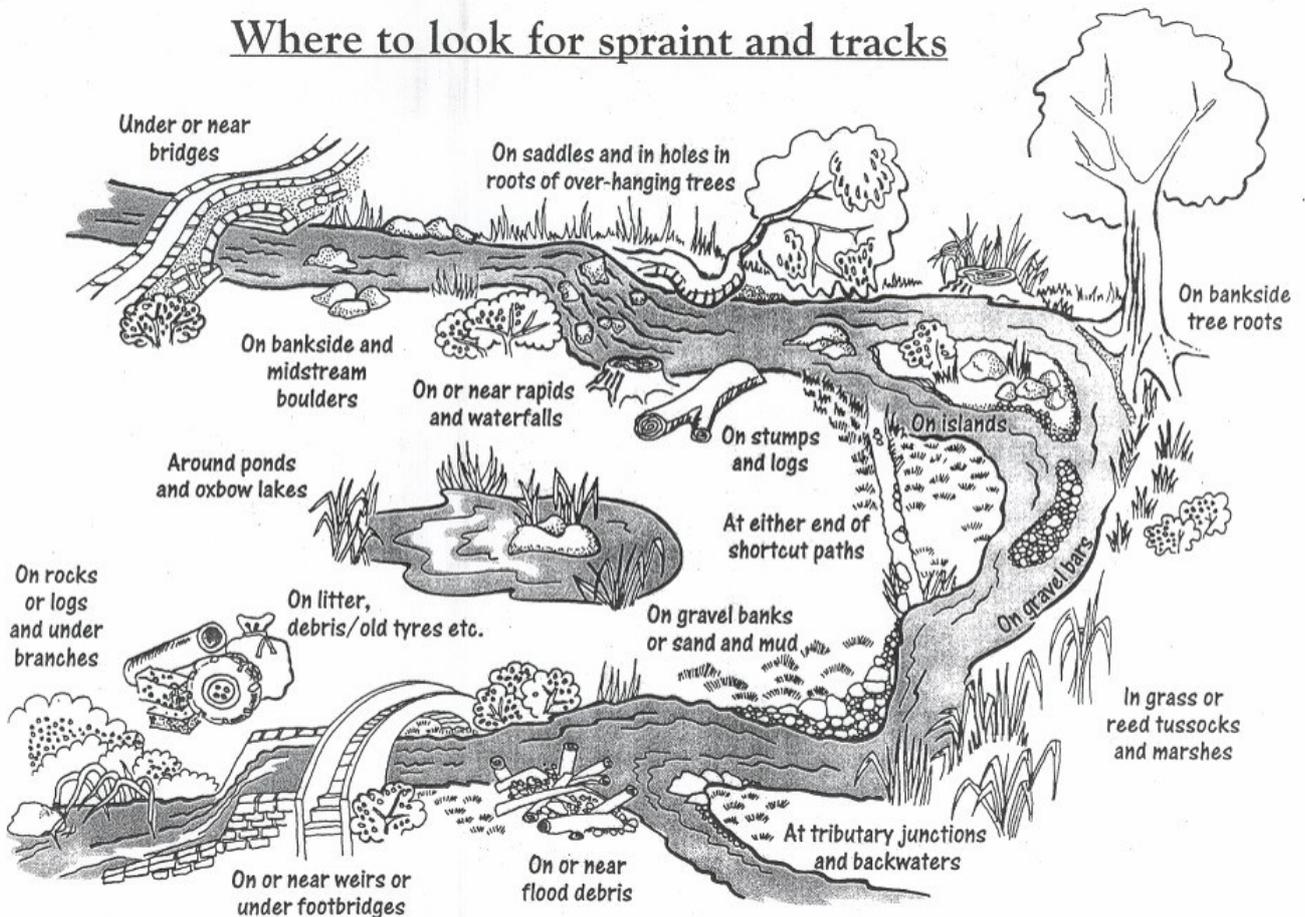
The bank there is concrete, and looks pretty featureless, but there is a very muddy stream the other side



Exeter Canal

of the towpath, so the otters are marking where they leave the canal to go to the stream. We are very lucky in that Otters are found on most rivers in Devon, so there are lots of places where spraint can be found.

Where to look for spraint and tracks



If you find some Otter spraint, please report it to the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre

<https://www.dbr.org.uk/wildlife-sightings/>



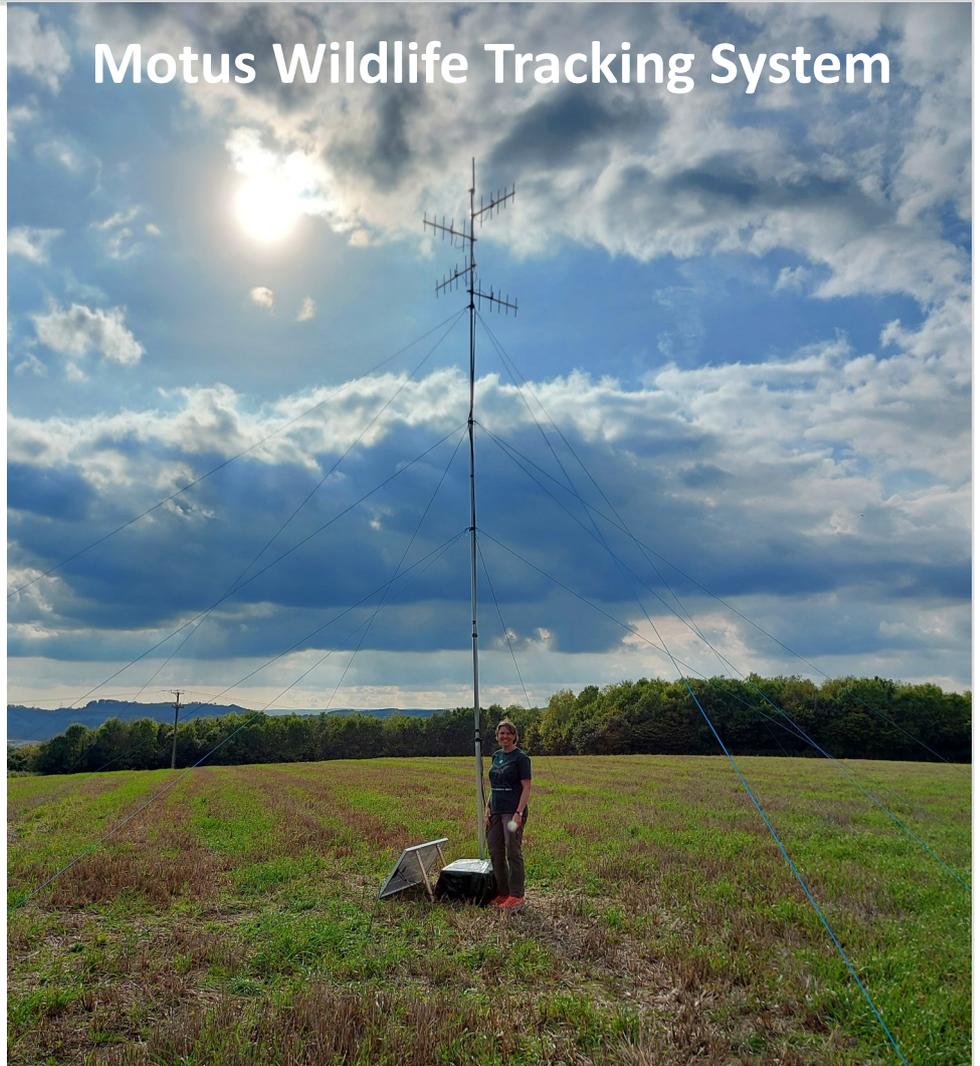
Motus Wildlife Tracking System

A large collaboration of scientists and conservationists has been working together to advance research into migratory bats and birds in the UK, by building a network of receivers that can track them through the installation of tiny radio transmitters fitted to the animal. These transmitters weigh only 0.6g, so even very small creatures can carry them without detriment to their performance. When a tagged bat or bird passes within range of a receiver (2-15 km depending on the terrain and how high the animal is flying), the receiver automatically logs the presence and direction of flight of the animal. If there is a large network of such radio-receiving stations, we can detail their movement over large areas and timescales. This collaborative network, named '**Motus Wildlife Tracking System**' was designed in Canada and can provide researchers with valuable data on birds and bats such as, migratory routes, lifespan, dispersal and foraging behaviour.

Imagine the excitement when a community wildlife group 'Chudleigh Wild', recently supported by a grant from DMG, were asked to assist with setting up the project to track Greater Horseshoe Bats (GHB), around the Bovey Basin. The project, led by Professor Fiona Mathews and funded by Sussex University, Devon County Council, and the other partners in the South Hams Greater Horseshoe Bat Steering Group, will look at the passage of bats from the cave roost at Chudleigh Rocks and other roosts in the South Devon area.

Chudleigh Wild were able to point the researchers in the direction of possible good locations and to landowners willing to house one of the telemetry masts, or nodes. Chudleigh Wild's bat group has been using both hand held detectors (bought through the DMG grant), and static detectors (loaned by DWT and the university) to trace the movement of GHBs around Chudleigh. They have shared their data with Fiona and her team and are very excited to see it put to good use.

Last Autumn several masts were erected within Chudleigh Parish, and during September/October 8 bats were tagged with very promising results. This year Fiona, her PhD Student Katie Allan, and electronics wizard Alan Shuttleworth, have been testing out the various bits of equipment, and they have nearly finished putting up 12 masts in our local area, as well as loggers in other known roosts, such as Buckfastleigh and Haytor, to see whether the Chudleigh bats travel to those more distant sites. This autumn and winter they will be tagging 15 bats. Very little is currently known about the movements of bats at this time of year, even though greater horseshoes are known to wake up, feed, and move location regularly throughout the winter.



Sue Smallshire



Water Vole release in West Devon appears to have been successful

This summer, Jess and Stephen from Devon Mammal Group were invited by a landowner near Exbourne in West Devon to come and look for Water Vole signs at his farm. In 2021, Graham received a grant from Devon Environment Foundation to release about 50 water voles into a network of streams and wet meadows.

We searched along a very promising looking ditch and along the stream where they had initially been released. At first we found a few lengths of vegetation that appeared to have been cut at a 45° angle, and lots of runs along the banks, but nothing definitive that we



One of the feeding signs showing a pile of Fool's-water-cress,



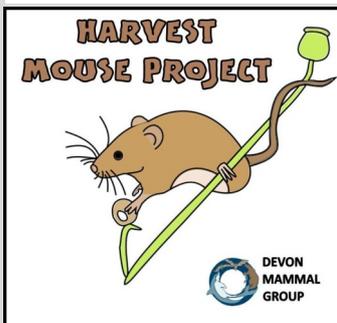
Water vole latrine showing fresh dropping of characteristic green colour and elongated shape.

could use to confirm presence. Access to the ditch was very difficult with lots of thick vegetation, but where it met the stream, we struck lucky. In a vigorous growth of fool's water-cress we found feeding signs and latrines. The Water Voles had made it through their first winter and were still present! We can't tell how many of the Water Voles had survived the year, but it's great to know that they are still there.

Whilst looking for Water Vole signs we also found some other spraint on a rock that appeared to be a regular sprainting site. A nice additional record.

Thank you, Graham for inviting us to survey and good luck to you and your water voles!

Jess Smallcombe



October sees the start of the National Harvest Mouse Survey!

Our Project Officer Sarah has agreed to continue her valuable work in Devon and will be liaising with The Mammal Society to support their national survey. She will be running some of her popular training sessions, as well as looking for the presence of Harvest Mice using live traps and by searching for their bones in owl pellets. Believe it or not, we now have seven years' data from this project and we are looking for funding to extend Sarah's

hours to give her time to pull all the records together.

Sarah will be encouraging us all to 'get out there' over the coming months and search for Harvest Mouse nests. If you would like to find out more go to:

Go on - Give it a go, it's fun! <http://devonmammalgroup.org/harvest-mouse-project.html>

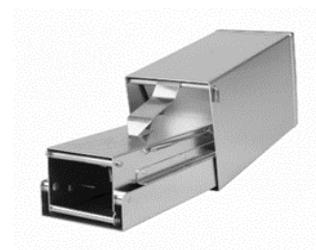


Surveying Equipment

DMG has its own equipment lending library. We encourage our members to get out there and get surveying whether it's for a big project or just to work on your surveying and Identification skills. The equipment is **free to borrow** for DMG group members, or we will ask for a deposit from those who are not members.

Equipment includes:

- Longworth traps
- EcoSS Tube traps
- Hedgehog footprint tunnels
- Camera traps
- Bat detectors



Please note that those borrowing equipment are responsible for their own safety and keeping the equipment in good condition, including the cleaning of equipment after use.

Shrews are insectivorous and have to eat every two hours so it is essential that you put in a variety of foods that they can eat such as live mealworms, fly casters or insect suet pellets as well as a seed mixture for the mice and voles.

Always add apple as this gives some liquid for the animals.

Always put a marker by your trap. **A missed trap is a death trap.**

Put the traps in shady spots.

Put traps out as late as possible and **check traps early on hot days.**

When storing traps dismantle them, empty and clean them straight after use.

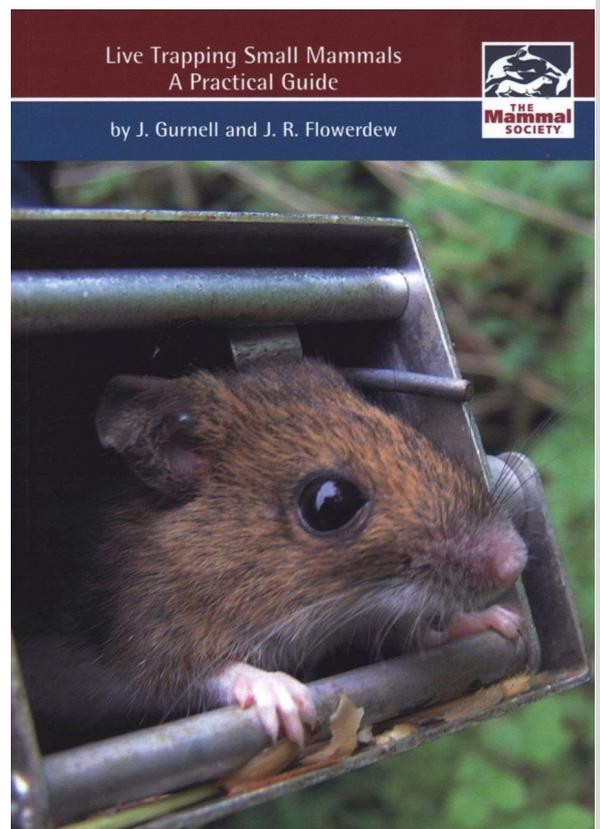
Always wear gloves when handling small mammals.

It is advisable to attend a small mammal trapping course before embarking on your first survey.

Live trapping Small Mammals is a great book if you plan on doing some small mammal trapping and is available from the **Mammal Society Bookshop** or from **NHBS** for **£7.99**

To access the application form go to:

<http://devonmammalgroup.org/hire-equipment.html>





Whale dead on Babbacombe beach

The British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) was called to the whale stranding at Babbacombe beach, Torquay recently. It was identified as a Sowerby's Beaked Whale, a deep-diving specialist species which does not usually come anywhere close to the coast. BDMLR teams attending the beach said the whale appeared "painfully thin, with visible vertebra showing and a broken beak". A fishing hook was found in the mammal's tongue, and it had suffered recent trauma to the head.



Read more at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-devon-62979914>



Mammal
SOCIETY

Whose poo? <https://www.mammal.org.uk/whose-poo/>

Mammals can be elusive and sometimes the first clue that they are there isn't the flash of a tail or the flick of an ear poking out of the foliage but a field sign – like poo! Often, finding and identifying the poo you find in your garden or on a walk will be the only way you know that a particular species of mammal is nearby. So how do you go about figuring out whose poo is whose? If you open the link above we hope that this page will help you ID what you find.





Tasmanian tiger: Scientists hope to revive marsupial from extinction

GETTY IMAGES



Researchers in Australia and the US are embarking on a multi-million dollar project to bring the Tasmanian tiger back from extinction. The last known one, officially called a thylacine, died in the 1930s.

The team behind the bid say it can be recreated using stem cells and gene-editing technology, and the first Thylacine could be reintroduced to the wild in 10 years' time.

The Thylacine earned its nickname of Tasmanian Tiger from the stripes along its back - but it was actually a marsupial, the type of Australian mammal that raises its young in a pouch.

The group of Australian and US scientists plans to take stem cells from a living marsupial species with similar DNA, and then use gene-editing technology to "bring back" the extinct species - or an extremely close approximation of it. It would represent a remarkable achievement for the researchers attempting it, and require a number of scientific breakthroughs.

The population of Tasmanian Tigers declined when humans arrived in Australia tens of thousands of years ago, and again when Dingoes - a species of Wild Dog - appeared. Eventually, the marsupial only roamed free on the island of Tasmania, and was ultimately hunted to extinction. The last captive Tasmanian tiger died at Hobart Zoo in 1936.

If scientists were to succeed in reviving the animal it would mark the first "de-extinction" event in history, but many outside experts are doubtful of the science behind it. "De-extinction is a fairytale science," Associate Professor Jeremy Austin from the Australian Centre for Ancient DNA told the Sydney Morning Herald, adding that the project is "more about media attention for the scientists and less about doing serious science".

A bit harsh, but one has to ask if such a large amount of money could be better spent