



Devon Mammal Group

March 2020 Newsletter

www.devonmammalgroup.org

Registered charity No. 1110056

Contents:

Chair's chat	Page 1
Our next talks	Page 1
Fingle Dormice	Page 2
Banquet for bats	Page 3
January sun & fun	Page 3
Beavers on Exmoor	Page 4
Small Grants	Page 4
Don't blame bats	Page 5
Sid Valley Project	Page 6
Pips & Pints	Page 6
Hedgehog Appeals	Page 7
Mammal Atlas	Page 8

Chair's Chat:

Welcome to the Spring edition of the 2020 newsletter.

We started the new year, and indeed a new decade, with two fantastic talks by guest speakers, Matt Parkins and Richard Green. These talks attracted audiences of 68 and 51 members and non-members, despite some interesting weather conditions. We really appreciate your support. Our talk on 10th March by Jochen Langbein, entitled "From Monarch of the Glen, to King of the Suburbs", promises to be just as interesting, and we hope to see some of you there.

The recent storms have caused awful flooding, triggered landslides, damaged structures, and brought down trees. This has had a huge impact on our wildlife, particularly to those species that hibernate in trees or on the ground, and to those living underground. We ask that if you find an injured or distressed animal, you please seek advice from one of Devon's wonderfully dedicated carers, most of whom are easily found by searching online. Please don't handle a wild animal, unless absolutely necessary for the purpose of taking it to a care facility.

On a lighter note, keep an eye out for our newly designed website, which will be going live soon. Our thanks go to Simon Capet for transferring our existing site to a new website builder and for helping Becky and Charly to create an exciting new website for us. Our programme of talks and events for the rest of the year will be available on it, so we look forward to seeing you all soon.

Helen - Chair - DMG



COMING UP NEXT ... Book with Charly: charlymead91@gmail.com 07795337409

March:

Tuesday 10 March: 7.30pm

Jurys Inn, Western Way, Exeter EX1 2DB



Jochen Langbein:
From Monarch of the Glen to King of the Suburbs.
The changing behaviour of deer and issues arising.

Members: £1.50, Non-Members £3.00

Booking essential

April:

Tuesday 21st April: 7.30pm

Jurys Inn, Western Way, Exeter EX1 2DB



Mark Elliott:
The River Otter Beaver Trial
Devon Wildlife Trust's Mark Elliott will give us an update on this amazing project.

Members: £1.50, Non-Members £3.00

Booking essential

Bumper audience for Matt's talk!

Our first talk for 2020 was a huge success. Matt Parkins introduced his ongoing research into Dormouse behaviour at Fingle Woods to a capacity audience of 68 people. The project has involved looking at areas where many Larch trees have had to be removed, due to *Phytophthora ramorum*, and the impacts on the surrounding Dormouse habitat.



Photo: Helen Calver

Along with volunteers, Matt has erected footprint tunnels, and we learned how Dormouse footprints are quite distinctive, due to the little triangular pads on their feet and the arrangement of their toes. The comparatively long tubes are open at both ends and have a little pad of 'ink' (made from olive oil and charcoal) at either end. The mice (and Wrens, so we saw on video!) that pass through the tube, leave their tell-tail footprints on a sheet of white card. 150 tubes were put up last season and the results recorded. The data collected will help to build a picture of how the Dormice are coping with the interruption to the landscape. It was great to see that the woodland is regenerating quickly and will probably provide the much better, more three-dimensional habitat that Dormice prefer.

These photos (from the Fingle Woods website) show the little triangular pads on the feet of Dormice and the prints they make.



Finally Matt showed us some video footage from CCT cameras placed inside some of the Dormouse boxes. DMG member, Tom Williams, had provided and worked on the cameras and the results were of amazing quality. They showed how, during hot periods, Dormice will use the box to sleep in without bothering to build a nest. We saw them bringing in material and building nests, as well as footage of a mum with two babies, only days old. We saw these babies again, later in the year, play-fighting with each other, before being ousted from their home by an aggressive Wood Mouse. However, they put up a good fight and seemed to leave uninjured.



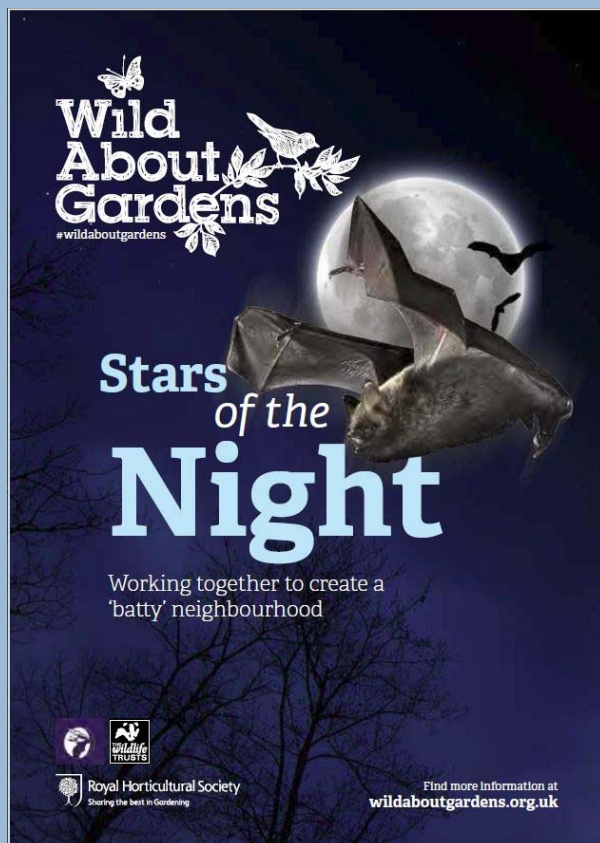
Photo: Tom Williams

For further information on the project visit:

<https://finglewoods.org.uk/2020/01/18/a-print-for-the-future/>

The raffle raised £65 which we agreed to send to WIRES, one of the agencies rescuing and treating injured and displaced animals in Australia. WIRES shares all funds collected with the other agencies helping to save and to treat the mammals across the country during this period of crisis. (For more information and to make donations visit www.wires.org.au/donate/emergency-fund.)

Sue Smallshire



Lay on a banquet for bats ...

BBC Gardeners' World Live 2019 were joined by the Bat Conservation Trust for their seventh consecutive year at the Show!

Their 'Moonlight Garden', designed to give inspiration and tips for encouraging bats into our gardens, was awarded the prestigious 'Best Indoor Feature' Award.

So they thought they'd delve into this subject a little more, with advice on things to plant, so you can work together to create a batty neighbourhood.

The new 'Stars of the night' leaflet is packed with ideas on how to encourage bats into your garden or space, how to welcome them throughout the seasons and how to make a bat box.

[https://cdn.bats.org.uk/pdf/Resources/Stars of the Night.pdf?mtime=20181101151554](https://cdn.bats.org.uk/pdf/Resources/Stars%20of%20the%20Night.pdf?mtime=20181101151554)



January sun, fun and focus on Harvest Mice!

On Saturday 18th January 52 people, many from the 'Moor Meadows' group, joined Harvest Mouse Project Officer, Sarah Butcher at Holne Village Hall, for yet another of her popular training days.



Sarah presented a comprehensive introduction to Harvest Mice and, as always, brought Hatty and Harriet, her two captive bread mice. The audience were wowed by the videos in the presentation and of course by the two little Harvest Mice on show.

Having seen photos, and her collection of solitary and breeding nests, there was an excited enthusiasm to get out and look for some more. The afternoon was kindly hosted by Donna and Kevin Cox at their lovely Brook Manor, near Buckfastleigh, and it was a surprisingly warm sunny day, after the grey wet weather that had hung around since the New Year.

We knew Harvest Mice were present on the farm and the field that we searched was perfect habitat for them, with the tall tussocky grass that is so suitable for nest

building. We spread out into three groups and almost straight away a nest was found. Over the couple of hours we had no fewer than 23 nests, some solitary nests, found on or near the ground and others larger breeding nests, which are built attached to the grass stems above ground.

Sarah and I, along with Robbie Philips from Brook Manor Farm, helped to confirm and record the nests and answer the numerous questions that had been generated by Sarah's presentation. There's no doubt that the training days Sarah is running are not only raising awareness of the importance of the right habitats for Harvest Mice but also the importance of hedgerow connectivity in our landscape for so many other species.

Sue Smallshire

NT reintroduce Beavers to Exmoor

The National Trust have reintroduce Beavers to the Holnicote Estate on Exmoor. They were released in February, and it's hoped Beavers will help with flood management and to improve biodiversity.



Photo: Dave Smallshire

burrow and then begin to modify the enclosure to suit their needs, allowing them to move around freely through the water and access food.

Beavers were once an important part of the natural environment but are believed to have gone extinct on mainland Britain during the 16th century, because they were hunted for their fur, meat and scent glands.

The pair released at Holnicote have come all the way from wild populations on the River Tay catchment in Scotland, under special licences arranged with Scottish Natural Heritage and Natural England. Beavers can only be found in a handful of places across the country and this is the first time the NT have released the animals into a river enclosure.

An adult pair of Eurasian Beavers has been released on the estate to improve flood management and support wildlife on the rivers they care for.

The Beavers will help make areas of the river more resilient to climate change and the extremes of weather it will bring. The dams they create will hold water in dry periods, help to lessen flash-flooding downstream, reduce erosion and improve water quality.

The two Beavers, a male and a female, have been released into a 2.7-hectare fenced area of unmanaged woodland on the estate. Once settled, they will build a lodge or

For more information: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/>

DEVON MAMMAL GROUP – SMALL GRANT SCHEME



Have you ever wanted to carry out research into mammals but have been prohibited due to costs? The Devon Mammal Group Small Grant Scheme was set up to enable members to carry out research into mammals in Devon. 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 complete the application form

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

and return it to charlymead91@gmail.com

DON'T BLAME THE BATS

The Bat Conservation Trust explain why media hysteria is ridiculous.

Bats can suffer from a bad press at the best of times; think spooky Halloween bats or horror stories about bats and development. There are times when the media coverage about these amazing animals can tend to the ridiculous. We are seeing such stories doing the rounds at the moment because of a new disease originating in China. It is suspected that bats may be the source of the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV), which is causing respiratory illness in thousands of people around the world (the global spread caused by the movement of infected individuals).



The animal origins of this virus have yet to be confirmed by scientists but it's closely related to others known from bats. However, one of the reasons that the virus has infected so many people isn't because of its possible bat origins but because it is transmitted from person to person, just like viruses that cause colds and flu. In an average year

around 600 people die from flu in the UK and this can be up to 650,000 globally in any given year. Scientists estimate the likely world-wide cases of 2019-nCoV infections in total will be just a fraction of the annual global cases of flu.

The potential association with bats has led to some very wild claims in the media. Some newspapers are going so far as to suggest that we shouldn't conserve bats, asking "why are we protecting them"? Well, that's a great question and one that the Bat Conservation Trust is more than happy to answer.

Bats account for over 20% of the World's mammals. Within this global diversity bats play vital roles in ecosystems, performing functions such as suppressing agricultural pests. For example, Mexican free-tailed bats in central Texas save cotton farmers in that area more than \$740,000 annually; in Thailand bats benefit farmers at the estimated equivalent of supplying rice to 26,000 people per year (an economic value of more than \$1.2 million); bats suppress pest-associated fungal growth and mycotoxin in corn crops and it is estimated this is worth more than \$1 billion globally on this crop alone. Bats pollinate plants including certain commercial crops. In Indonesia bats play key role in durian fruit production which had an export value of almost \$255 million in 2013. Other commercial crops pollinated by bats include mango, banana, cashew, guava and agave (used to make tequila). Bats also act as seed dispersers for many other plants making a vital contribution to forest regeneration

In the UK, bats are Indicator Species, because changes to our bat populations can indicate changes in other aspects of biodiversity or the environment which we all ultimately depend on. For example bats might suffer when there are problems with insect populations (because our native bats feed on insects) or when habitats are destroyed or poorly managed (for example, some bats only live in mature and connected woodlands). Sadly, many bat species around the world are vulnerable or endangered due to factors ranging from loss and fragmentation of habitat, diminished food supply, destruction of roosts, disease, hunting for meat or 'medicine', and killing for a variety of other reasons.

It is some of these very threats that can result in cases of spillover of a virus into human populations (zoonoses) either directly or via an intermediate host such as livestock or wild animals hunted for food. The 2019-nCoV is believed to have first infected humans at a market in Wuhan, China, where live wild animals were being sold for human consumption.

Photo by Daniel Hargreaves



Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) www.bats.org.uk

Sid Valley Bat Project 2020 Update

This year has found two new Brown Long-eared Bat roosts and one new Pipistrelle roost in the Sid Valley with good numbers of bats being present along the river corridor of the Sid. The weather was unfair to us on a few occasions which meant we did not undertake as many surveys as we had scheduled, therefore data from new areas was limited this year. We did find Brown Long-eared Bats were actively foraging in the Millennium Garden in Sidbury, which shows success in terms of supporting biodiversity through the development of such areas within villages.

In 2020 we are going to focus on surveying an area called Fire Beacon Hill and Core Hill in the north-west of the valley in more detail. In the past we have found nine species including Barbastelle and Lesser Horseshoe Bats here and hope that expanding the static detector and trapping effort this year will provide more detail for specific areas within the Site. Fire Beacon Hill is a Local Nature Reserve of lowland heath surrounded by both broadleaved and coniferous woodland owned by Sidmouth Town Council and managed by the RSPB. The area is also partly owned by the Woodland Trust and Forestry England with the organisations having partnered up to create an approach to bring improvements to the habitat with joined up thinking. We are going to endeavour to provide information and advice to help guide their strategy to manage the area to enhance the habitats for bats.



The dates for 2020 are:

Saturday 16th May

Saturday 23rd May

Saturday 8th August

Saturday 15th August

Saturday 5th September

Saturday 19th September

If you would like to take part this year please contact:

louisewooley@hotmail.co.uk



Pips & Pints

Tuesday 5 May

8.30pm to 10.30 pm

Look and listen for urban bats around the cemetery and beyond. Will we find some lucky horseshoes? Some bat detectors will be available but if you have your own please bring it with you. Optional pub stop after.

Joint event with Devon Bat Group and DWT Exeter Local Group

Thanks to Exeter CC & Sarah Butcher.

Meet at the Catacombs Park, Bartholomew St West entrance, St David's, Exeter.

grid ref: SX 9167 9259

URGENT! 2 WAYS 2 HELP HEDGEHOGS

Hedgehogs in the UK are in serious trouble. Repeated studies have shown that the nation's favourite animal is being wiped out.



1. Latest Appeal from The Mammal Society: Hogs on Roads 2020

Last year we asked you to help record hedgehog sightings and ran an appeal to raise money to fund research into hedgehog road deaths. Thanks to your help, we have now identified hotspots where hedgehogs are most at risk on roads. Click [here](#) to view our interactive map or to donate. The map is free for communities and local authorities to use. **However, the work doesn't stop there...**

Thousands of hedgehogs die annually on Britain's roads. **The last estimate, made in 2016, put the figure at between 167,000 and 335,000 animals.** With the current estimated number of live hedgehogs in Britain believed to be around 500,000, it doesn't take a maths genius to work out that the situation is dire.



Does slowing down for hedgehogs make a difference?

We want to continue to track the progress of hedgehogs and carry out vitally needed research into the best method of preventing road deaths. In particular we want to find out if introducing speed limits in high risk areas might be a way of reducing hedgehog mortality on roads.

We need your help

Any contribution you can make to our Hogs on Roads 2020 appeal will allow us to continue this important work to help conserve what is one of Britain's most iconic mammal species.



2. Help save Hedgehogs with 'Hedgehog Highways'

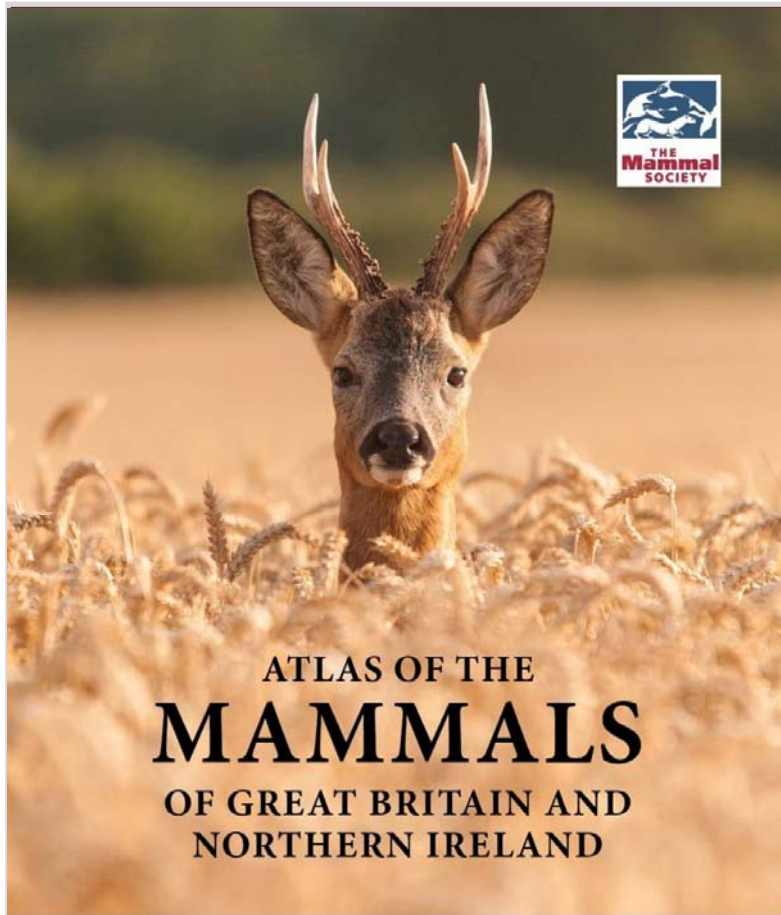
An appeal from Hedgehog expert Hugh Warwick

I'm an ecologist and author and I've been studying hedgehogs for over 30 years. I know that a key cause of them dying out is that our landscapes are being fenced off into ever smaller fragments. **We need to make sure new housing developments include 'Hedgehog Highways'** - a 13 cm hole in the bottom of a fence that allows hedgehogs to move freely between gardens to find food and find a mate.

This simple move would have a **big impact on the UK's Hedgehogs** - and it's cheap and easy for developers to carry out. **So I'm calling upon government to ensure every new housing development builds in these holes for Hedgehog Highways.** This will allow gardens to be connected, creating the pathways they need to survive. We can't sit back and let Hedgehog numbers keep plummeting. **It's estimated that numbers are already down 95% since the 1950s.** We have to act now.

Please sign our petition, via the link below, to call on the Ministry of Housing and Planning to make hedgehog highways a legal requirement of new builds.

<https://www.change.org/p/help-save-britain-s-hedgehogs-with-hedgehog-highways>



ATLAS OF THE MAMMALS OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND



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River Otter Beaver Trial Science and Evidence Report



Pink-tagged female beaver with a kit on the River Otter near Otterton in 2017

Photo: Nick Lipson / naturapl.com

The River Otter Beaver Trial report is out!

England's first - and only - wild Beaver re-introduction project has been running for five years. **But the beavers now need your support one last time.**

The government has now **extended the River Otter Beaver Trial by six months** while decisions are made about their long-term presence in East Devon - and potentially elsewhere in the country.

It's important the government has time to get this decision right. Because if beavers are given the green light, and allowed to thrive once again throughout the River Otter and beyond, it will be one of the most important moments in English conservation history.

To read the report open the link below:

<https://www.devonwildlifetrust.org/what-we-do/our-projects/river-otter-beaver-trial>

