



# Devon Mammal Group

## Newsletter Aug-Sept 2023

[www.devonmammalgroup.org](http://www.devonmammalgroup.org)

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### Chair's Chat

Welcome to the Autumn 2023 newsletter. We hope you had a good summer. In June DMG visited Sharpham near Totnes, where we were treated to a rewilding tour by Ambios, to whom we are very grateful for their time (see below). The Committee has also been busy attending events and undertaking activities at Yarnor Wood, Exeter Cathedral, and Meldon (see page 2 for details). The Harvest Mouse Project is gearing up for the 2023/24 survey season; a round up of the 2022/23 season is on page 3. Devon Wildlife Trust approached DMG about the proposed Pine Marten and Wildcat reintroductions, and consultations have been held. We are very excited to be involved in the early stages of these projects and will bring you updates and any opportunities to participate in the near future (page 4). In October 2022 legislative changes were made to protect wild-living beavers in England, now listed as European Protected Species. An update on national and local beaver news is on page 6. Information about our autumn and New Year talks are on page 13. We look forward to seeing you soon. Finally, please join us for our AGM in September, and have a say in how DMG is run over the coming year. Updates will be provided by e-newsletter but also keep an eye on our Facebook and Twitter/X accounts, and do get in touch with small grant requests, mammal-related stories, or about small mammal surveys and event invitations.

Kind regards, Helen  
DMG Chair



### **DMG AGM 2023 on THURS 7 SEPTEMBER 7.30pm**

*at the KENN CENTRE, off A38 [map link](#)*

*Plus 'Natural Flood Management' (learning from mammals) by Emily Cuff (DWT)*

### DMG visit: Sharpham

DMG's summer field event was a visit to [Lower Sharpham Barton Farm rewilding project](#), on Friday 30 June. Based on the outskirts of Ashprington near Totnes by the banks of the River Dart, ecological education charity Ambios tenant the land and are working on establishing a different management approach on what were formerly intensive fields.

This entails ceasing use of chemical fertilisers and allowing livestock, such as pigs, to roam freely between fields, simulating what wild boar might once have done. The aim is to restore the ecological health of the land, whilst keeping it agriculturally productive; also to monitor and survey any changes to wildlife before, after, and during this process, with all the learning and



Hearing about rewilding at the Sharpham end Photo: Charly Mead

## DMG Sharpham visit

.... continued

training opportunities for future and early career ecologists this brings.

The morning was a tour of the site, while the second part of the day was more a discussion about mammals, which species may be present, and how they may be using the landscape. Which is where DMG could come in: Ambios are keen to carry out further mammal surveys, with a particular interest in Harvest Mice; noting the reedbed habitats there, another suggestion was Water Shrew survey (see pages 8–10 below). An Ambios DMG newsletter article may follow.

For any DMG members interested in Water Shrew surveying at Sharpham in 2024, please get in contact via e-mail [events@devonmammalgroup.org](mailto:events@devonmammalgroup.org). There may also be a Sharpham Dormouse nestbox scheme, current status unknown ...

## On the Road – DMG at events

### Stands and delivery

#### Yarner Wood Wildlife Discovery Day, Dartmoor Sun 14 May

Described as “a good time and not too madly busy”, plenty of visitors were interested in our stand, sharing the space with the DWT Pine Marten project. In an impromptu compare and contrast ‘mustelid off’, Max the stuffed Otter was on the same table as a Pine Marten box – several people looked one to the other and wondered how Max would be able to get into the box, saying they didn’t think Pine Martens were that big. Albert Knott from Natural England Yarner Wood said “*Thank you all very much for attending and running such a successful activity. Everyone had a great time thanks partly to your help*”.

Photo: Chris Harbut Natural England



In February, DMG completed its Dormouse survey for [Rowden](#) near North Tawton. Nest tubes confirmed presence in all four of the areas surveyed: two Devon hedges, a green lane leading to a woodland, and woodland edge. Earlier monitoring after 6 months recorded signs in one hedge only. Tubes were left in place for over 18 months; if not, three of the locations would’ve been recorded (wrongly) as negative.

Photo: Hilary Marshall



#### Exeter Cathedral bioblitz Fri – Sat 21 – 22 July

Exeter Cathedral invited DMG to check out God’s Acre, or the nearer 3 acres, of the Bishop’s Garden, for some of God’s furrier creatures. Private and secluded at the very heart of Exeter city centre, a mini-small mammal trapping session revealed that the woodbanks, woodpiles, and cottage garden borders within the ancient walls are home to several Woodmice and a Bank Vole as well as the Bishop. No doubt bats are roosting there too somewhere, alongside past reported Badger and Hedgehog activity, and on the day a couple of fresh foxy messages left for us on the formal gravel paths.

Photo: Exeter Cathedral [Facebook](#)

### Plus look out for ....

#### Meldon Wildlife Festival 2023 Tues 22 August 10.30 – 4pm.

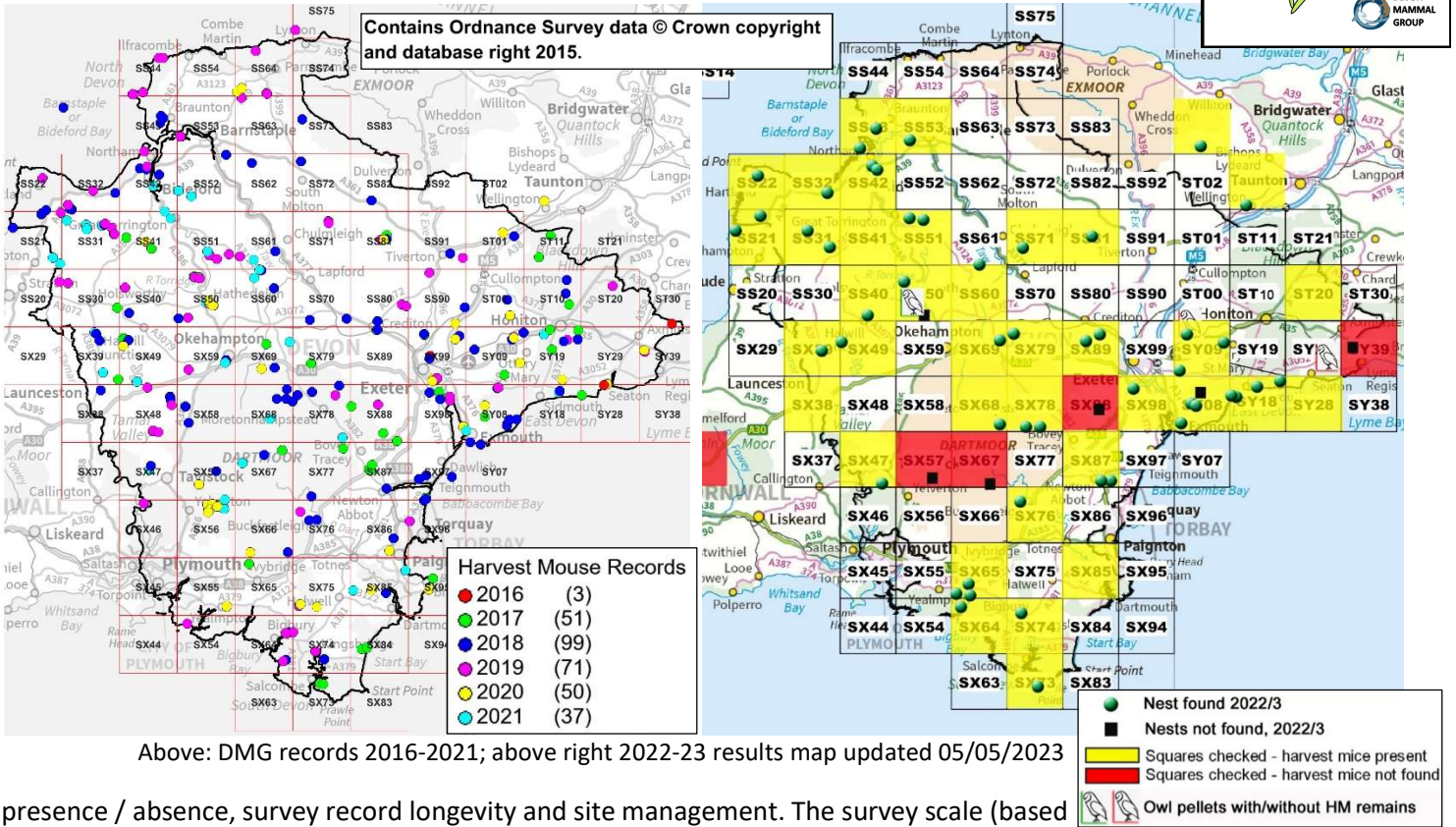
DMG will be returning to [Meldon Wildlife Festival](#), south west of Okehampton, hosted by Dartmoor National Park, with stuffed Otter (Max again), mammally bits and bobs, crafts and a quiz. Anyone is welcome to join us, for all or part of the day

Photo: Dartmoor NP



# DMG Harvest Mouse Project – taking stock

The 2022-3 survey period finished in spring. The project has been running now since 2016, with the additive value of tracking sites year on year instead of a snapshot only of an individual season (see maps below). One finding has been marked fluctuations in numbers and results between years, the same sites with many nests one year and few or none the next – with implications for assessing



Above: DMG records 2016-2021; above right 2022-23 results map updated 05/05/2023

presence / absence, survey record longevity and site management. The survey scale (based on presence / absence in 10km squares) and methodology were key questions at the Project outset, that needed to be manageable over a large county, but also gain meaningful data, and be repeatable. The Devon project model has informed the national survey, and DMG’s Harvest Mouse Project Officer now sits on the Mammal Society’s national steering committee for Harvest Mouse. The Devon project has also trialled other survey methods, such as using trailcams (see below right) and analysing Barn Owl pellets. In April, a trailcam at RHS Rosemoor near Great Torrington finally recorded Harvest Mice, after four years and some 3000 images per month of various other small mammals and birds.

One aspect that has come increasingly to the fore through the 6-7 years has been public engagement. Survey training workshops have proven extremely popular – and in demand. There are already two workshops planned for the 2023-4 season, Mon 9 Oct at Meeth, near Hatherleigh, and Sun 14 Oct at Mutters Moor, Sidmouth. Captive bred and kept Harvest Mice have been ambassadors for mammal conservation and wildlife generally at schools and wildlife events.

Appointing a dedicated part time project officer, and seeking small scale funding to support the post, was a new venture for DMG in 2016, with some risks and many unknowns. However there is no doubt that it has been a success, due to the two brilliant project officers, first Peter Cooper, then Sarah Butcher. Funding has always been on an annual basis, dependent on grants and underwritten by DMG core funds; any one year could have turned out to be the last. The next 2023-4 season is secure, with thanks to the Devon Environment Foundation, and DMG is grateful for the generosity of members and others who have given significant donations specifically towards the Harvest Mouse project.

The survey and workshops have been working superbly well, but have always been recognised as the first step only. Future directions will need to devise a method for the trickier task of determining Harvest Mouse population



Coombe Mill trailcam. Photo: J. Valters

densities, and delve deeper into habitat types and preferences. A next action will be to review experiences over 2016-2023, and what has been discovered and learned so far, towards further developing the project.

### DWT projects: Pine Martens ...

Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) have now appointed a project officer for their Two Moors Pine Marten Project, which looks to establish the groundwork and test the potential for future re-introduction in two areas. These are Dartmoor and Exmoor, following initial analyses of feasibility and habitat.

The current first phase focuses very much on public consultation, as part of which have been drop-in sessions, meetings with key stakeholder groups, a commissioned University of Exeter public attitudes survey, and stands at local events to put Pine Martens in the picture (literally; below left). DMG was invited to participate in one such specialist meeting, to air any concerns about impacts on protected species, such as bats or Dormice.

The outcome and results of the consultation are expected in the autumn. DMG has also been approached regarding calls for volunteering in the prospective release areas. A first round of volunteer induction has finished but we are told there are likely to be more in due course. These would involve various scoping, habitat suitability and baseline surveys:

of botanical assemblages, food availability analysis, ground truthing of identified sites, and mapping of veteran trees for availability and density of denning sites. More specialised bat and Dormouse surveys would be possible for any interested licensed survey volunteers.

DWT are in discussion with DMG about small mammal surveys, for gathering baseline data prior to any Pine Marten release, and also to gauge population levels of potential prey. Any news and opportunities from DWT will be passed on to DMG members as information becomes available. We also hope to arrange a Pine Marten project talk from DWT.



Photo from DWT webpage



Photo: Chris Harbut, Natural England



Photo cdn.cbuc.com from DWT webpage

### ... and Wildcats

There are parallels with DWT's new Wildcat project, with plans for a similar series of stakeholder consultations, baseline small mammal and other surveys, and opportunities for volunteer participation. Some survey programme elements for both Pine Marten and Wildcat projects may be combined. DMG committee has been approached for direct discussion about small mammal surveying and monitoring methodology, meeting DWT project officers in August; we will report back.

In May 2023, Scottish Wildcat Action (SWA), a National Lottery funded collaborative project running 2015–2020 led by NatureScot, announced its final reports, and serious concerns that there are too few Wildcats in the country for a viable self-sustaining population to survive, in the short or long term. Of 529 animals genetically profiled, not one scored highly enough to be classified as pure Wildcat. Chronic interbreeding with domestic cats is the cause. A separate morphological analysis of 118 dead cat specimens, half of which were road victims, came to the same conclusion. This was a sample only, but a sizeable one, and potentially representative of the wild population, which is already reduced to a remnant of 100–300 individuals. Other threats are traffic collisions, habitat and prey loss, persecution and disease. SWA, and IUCN are aware of the prospect of the first effective extinction of a UK wild mammal since the Beaver in the 16th century.

Native non-interbred Wildcat genotypes may only exist now in captivity. SWA view urgent action as still possible, if the remaining wild living population can be bolstered with captive-bred animals: all fertile captive Wildcats in the Scottish Wildcat Studbook (managed by Royal Zoological Society of Scotland) have been genetically screened, and the captive breeding population has increased by 67%. Copies of SWA 2023 [final summary report](#) and [specialist reports](#) are available online. In June, PTES released 22 Wildcats into Cairngorms National Park, part of a project aiming to add around 60 animals over the next 3 years. **DWT is giving on online talk about its Wildcat project** on Thurs 23 Nov, 6-7pm, [details and booking](#) on the DWT website. We will seek to set up a talk for DMG in the near future.

Sources: [NatureScot](#) webpage and press release, and [Yahoo](#) and [PTES](#) websites

# Nest efforts: what goes into a Hazel Dormouse nest?

Summary of the paper by Sarah A. Collins *et al.* 2023 'Nest material preferences in wild Hazel Dormice *Muscardinus avellanarius*: testing predictions from optimal foraging theory'

Optimal Foraging Theory is usually associated with how animals search for food. The theory predicts that animals will forage in a way that maximises the net yield of energy. However, a recent paper in *Behavioral Ecology* applies the theory to the way in which Dormice forage for nesting materials. Instead of energy gains, there must be other benefits of the different materials used. The authors looked at summer nests. Construction of winter nests has already been studied by Leonardo Gubert, who we have been lucky to have speak to us about his research in the past.

For those of us who have experience in checking Dormouse nestboxes we know that nests can be made from a variety of different plants, although there is usually a central core structure and an outer layer. The research carried out here tests whether there is a preference for certain materials, which Dormice will go out of their way to collect, or if they just use what is nearby and easy to find.

There are a few considerations a Dormouse needs to make when constructing a nest. Factors that might affect a Dormouse's choice of material have been distilled into three points:

- 1) availability of materials (and distance);
- 2) predation risk whilst collecting and
- 3) variation in nesting material quality.

Most studies on nests have, understandably, looked at birds. But the same issues would affect a Dormouse. A "good" nest, the authors say, will take into account factors such as thermoregulation, protection from predators and reduction of parasites. The study looked at six sites in the south west, with the help of the Devon Dormouse network, including some DMG members.

All 42 nests in the study were in Dormouse boxes, except for one which was in a bird box. Where nests were not likely to be used again they were collected and separated by hand to determine plant composition. A few were gently inspected in situ. The study found that there were some species that seemed to be favoured by Dormice, including Honeysuckle bark for the core, which was favoured over Hazel bark. Thin, woven strips of both were found in the nests. Beech and oak leaves were favoured for the outer layers.



Photo: Jess Smallcombe

## Material considerations

It seems as though nesting material use only partially follows Optimal Foraging Theory, with some choices made due to the proximity of the material, but others used even when they are some distance away from the nest. These preferences were consistent across all six sites. Interestingly, they found that although Hazel trees may be preferred as a nest site, the leaves are not actually used very often in construction.

To find out why these materials are chosen requires further study. Is Honeysuckle bark easier to weave? Do oak leaves offer good thermoregulation properties when dry? Which material is least attractive to parasites? This paper cannot answer these questions, but looking at the availability of the materials does offer greater insight into material importance and preference, as they say, than looking at overall use alone. This is a very interesting read and I recommend it to anyone who would like to learn more on the topic (link below).

Jess Smallcombe

Source: SA Collins, SM Lane, M Ishibashi & T Hamston (2023) Nest material preferences in wild Hazel Dormice *Muscardinus avellanarius*: testing predictions from optimal foraging theory *Behavioral Ecology* 34 (3): 418-425

# Beavers nationally and locally

Clare Howe from Natural England is to outline current knowledge, thinking and plans for Beavers in a presentation to the Mammal Society Conference at the University of Nottingham in August. Some main points are given in the abstract for the presentation: the first release of Beavers into an outdoor fenced enclosure occurred in the early 2000s and since then releases into enclosures have taken place at a further 45 sites. Escapes from enclosures as well as unlawful releases (releases into the wild without a licence) have resulted in at least five and possibly six wild-living Beaver populations in England. The five-year trial authorised in 2015 (in the River Otter catchment, east Devon) observed and monitored wild-living Beavers to explore the prospect of a formal England-wide reintroduction. Following the success of the trial and a growing interest in Beaver reintroduction, the Government conducted a consultation, led by Natural England, seeking public and stakeholder views on further reintroduction in England. This put forward options to promote coexistence and investigated ways of managing any future challenges. A summary of the consultation responses was published in Autumn 2022, but the Government has still yet to decide on further wild releases of Beavers in England. The presentation will go on to highlight the considerations that need to be given to further reintroductions, explain the likely next steps for Beavers in England and the opportunities available to explore and expand knowledge of the influences of Beavers in the English landscape.

## DWT beaver zones

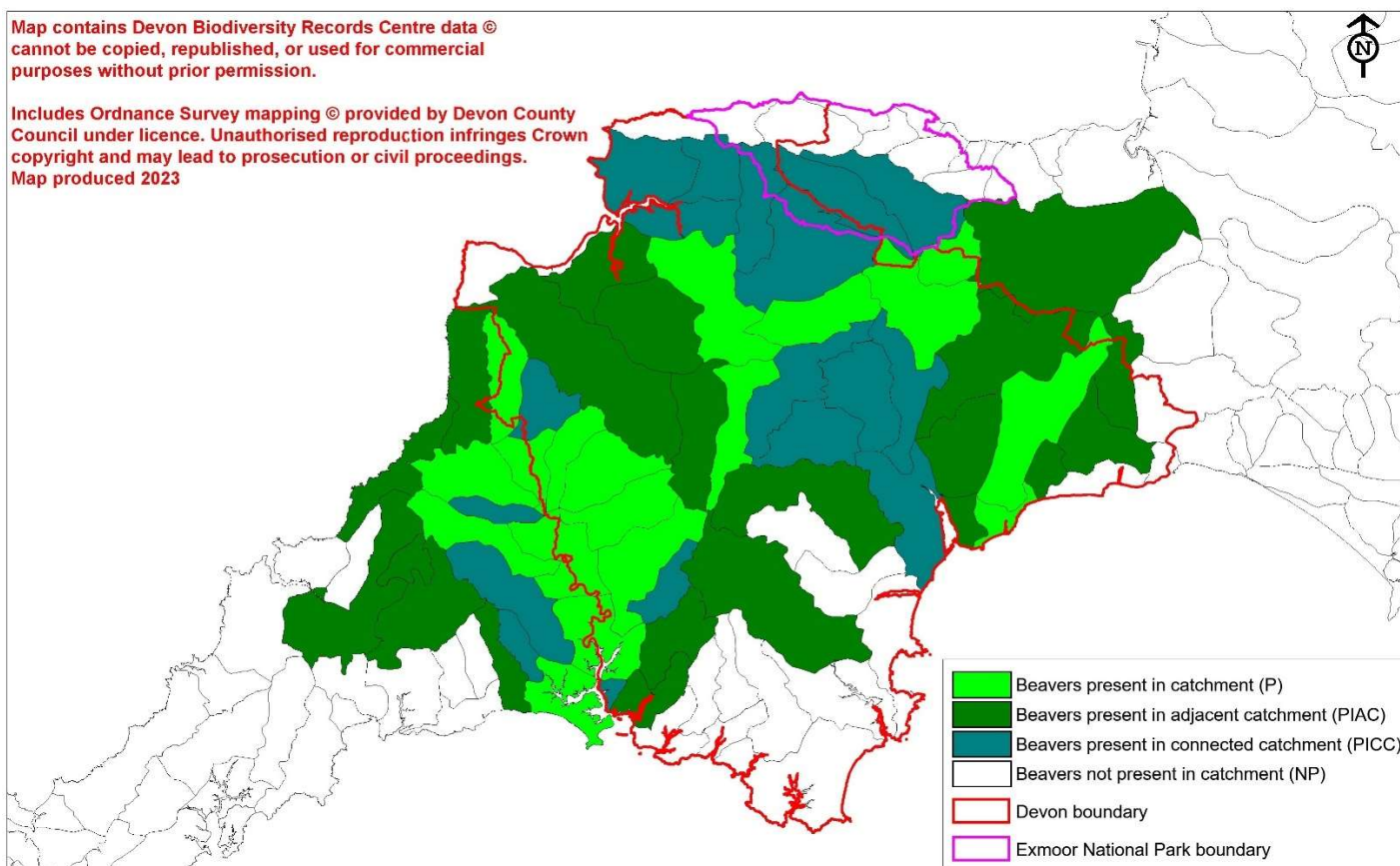
Meanwhile, for those wild-living Beavers Devon Wildlife Trust has produced a map zoning where Beavers are currently known (on the Rivers Otter, Tamar, Taw, Culm, upper Exe and Culm); connecting catchments which Beavers could be expected to colonise in the near future; and adjacent catchments which may be colonised in due course. The map of Beaver Activity Zones is aimed at site managers and local authority planners, so that any current or future operations near ponds or watercourses are compliant with Beaver legal protection.

### Beaver Activity Zones (January 2023)



Map contains Devon Biodiversity Records Centre data © cannot be copied, republished, or used for commercial purposes without prior permission.

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## Rodents great and small

In east Devon, Beavers have been found to support Water Vole populations, documented in a recent *Mammal Communications* paper: [A Puttock et al. \(2023\) Positive coexistence of water voles and beaver: water vole expansion in a beaver engineered wetland](#) vol. 9: 7-15; click the link to download the paper as a pdf.

## More teeth for UK ivory ban

Fears that the tightening enforcement of the ban on trading elephant ivory could stimulate increased poaching on other threatened and protected mammals has led to five more species being brought under the Ivory Act 2018.

A complete ban on elephant ivory came into force in June 2022. Following a lengthy government consultation, it will now be illegal to bring into the UK the teeth or tusks from Orca, Sperm Whale, Hippopotamus, Narwhal and Walrus.

There is particular concern about Hippopotamus ivory, the second most commonly marketed to that of elephants. According to a 2021 report [The Often Overlooked Ivory Trade](#) by the group TRAFFIC, which monitors wildlife trade, the amounts traded between 2009-18 would have been derived from an average of 1,349 hippos annually over that period. This gives *circa* 13,500 taken in total over 10 years, from a worldwide Hippopotamus population estimated at between 115,000 – 130,000 animals, across a broad but often sparse distribution covering most sub-Saharan African countries.

The change to UK legislation has been welcomed but is a small step in a global context; Hippopotamus is listed under Appendix II of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species), allowing some regulated trade, but a proposed complete ban did not pass at the CITES conference in 2022.

Source: [BBC Wildlife magazine](#) Discover Wildlife website article by James Fair



Photo Adobe Stock # 2020763

## Other wild cats at large?

Big cat sightings, and press reports about them, periodically emerge from the undergrowth. Could such animals really be living wild in woodlands or the remoter areas of the crowded UK? Rationalised explanations are of serial one-off escapees from private zoos, though there is scepticism of a secretive but self-sustaining breeding population. Amongst the scare stories and blurry photographs, incontrovertible evidence has been as elusive as the big cats themselves.

However, black hair samples collected from around a 2022 Gloucestershire lamb casualty have recently been purported to have a 99.9% match to Leopard *Panthera pardus*, after mitochondrial DNA analysis by a forensic laboratory. Filmmaker Matt Everett of Dragonfly Films commissioned the testing, and the story is to be presented as part of a documentary exploring big cat claims throughout Britain, 'Panthera Britannia Declassified'.

Previous DNA samples from two other candidate local big cat attacks, from a lamb at the same farm in 2017, and from a deer carcass in Feb 2012 at National Trust Woodchester Park near Stroud, after analysis by the University of Warwick proved respectively to be inconclusive, or in the latter instance to be principally from Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*. Nevertheless the National Trust Head Ranger at the time continued to believe that big cats could be roaming nearby, having reportedly seen a Lynx first hand himself. For the 2017 case, which was also investigated by Dragonfly Films, while results could not be obtained from the DNA tests, toothmarks in the jawbone were considered by the Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester potentially to have been made by the molar and premolar of a big cat.

On both these past occasions, the DNA analysis was carried out by University of Warwick, and it was due to the previous interest that the farmer alerted Dragonfly Films to the 2022 incident, involving a larger lamb. It has not been stated which agency or laboratory carried out the latest DNA testing which concluded the close match to Leopard; the laboratory has requested to remain anonymous.

Sources: [The Guardian](#) and [BBC Wildlife magazine](#) Discover Wildlife websites, Matt Everett / Dragonfly Films press release



Photo still from Dragonfly Films / IBC website

# Headline Shrews

## Shrew records still needed



Continuing the shrew topic in the January 2023 DMG newsletter, the need for records was emphasised by information in the Mammal Society webinar 17 May 2023: “Shrew and me: The rise of the Greater White Toothed Shrew”.

It was a fascinating story presented by Dr Allan McDevitt of the Atlantic Technological University in Ireland and Ian Bond, past secretary of Northumbria Mammal Group. A combination of detective work and science, if you missed it and have an hour to spare it is well worth viewing <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ljHri6u0ec>

The non-native Greater White-toothed Shrew *Crocidura russula* (GWTS) was discovered in Ireland in 2007. It has spread at a rate of 5.5km per year. The only wild small mammals in Ireland before that were Bank Vole *Myodes glareolus* (introduced in 1920s), Wood Mouse *Apodemus sylvaticus* and Pygmy Shrew *Sorex minutus*.

### Eats, shrews and leaves

As the GWTS spread, the Pygmy Shrews disappear within a year, this being confirmed by an intensive trapping programme. The next question was why can the two species not co-exist in Ireland? A study of their diet using metabarcoding by Dr Samuel Browett (Fig. 1 below) looked at food of the Pygmy Shrew before the GWTS arrived, that of the GWTS once the Pygmy Shrew had gone and where both were present at the same time. As a control they looked at the diet of both species on a French Island where they have co-existed for thousands of years – the two outer columns on the diagram. The middle column of the GWTS shows that in a newly invaded area they are feeding

on large prey such as beetles (dark green), earthworms (Haplotaxida; khaki) and pill-millipedes (Glomerida; light blue). Once the Pygmy Shrews have gone, the GWTS diet shifts to smaller invertebrates such as spiders and woodlice. It may be that they exhaust the larger invertebrate prey. At first the diets overlap by 11-14% but once the GWTS are more established the overlap is 39-46%. Further work is required, and other aspects are going to be investigated, such as the influence of parasites and pathogens.

### Shrew and tell

So far GWTS have been confirmed in north east England and Nottinghamshire. When might they reach Devon? If they do, will we know whether they have any impact on other species of shrew here? We need baseline information about how widespread our native shrews are, so make a note of anything that the cat brings in, analyse owl pellets, note any dead shrews that you see. As always for a biological record to be accepted you need Who? What? When? Where? (*i.e.* Recorder’s name, species [preferably

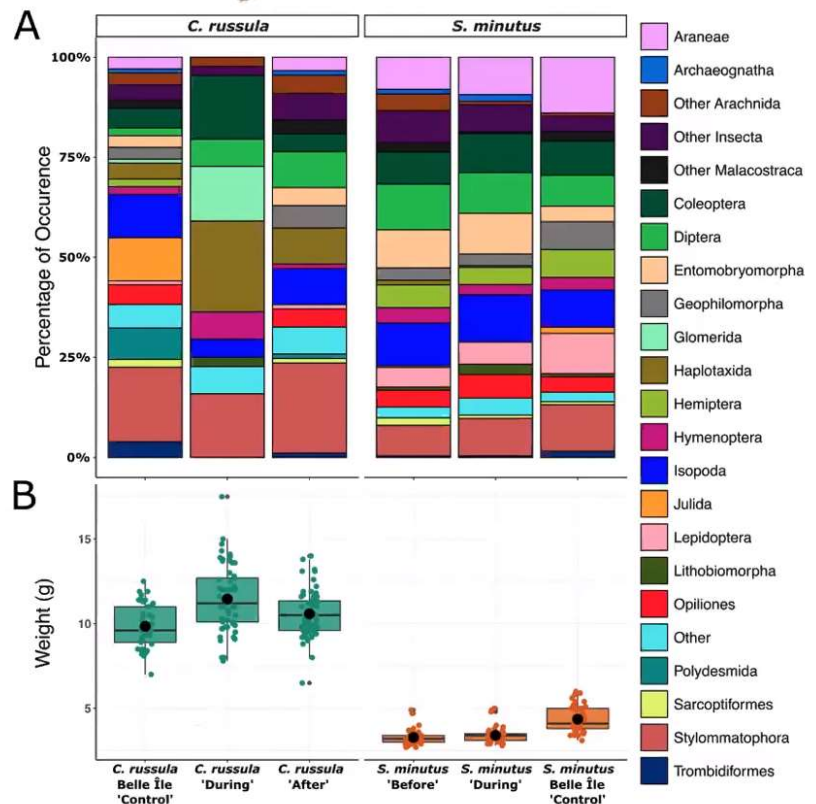


Fig. 1. Diets of the two shrew species (Dr S. Browett)

with photo], date and location). The Mammal Mapper app which is free to download automatically records your location and date. More details are at <http://www.mammal.org.uk/searching-for-shrews>

## Shrew business

In January 2024 DMG and Cornwall MG are jointly hosting a Zoom talk by Dr Dina Dechmann about her work on Common Shrews which shows, amongst many other fascinating facts, that they can reversibly change their skull size in winter – keep an eye out for details of the talk in the next newsletter.

DMG has received two records of Water Shrews via Facebook in recent years, one near Bideford and one on the edge of Dartmoor (see below). More needed! Records can also be sent to Devon Biodiversity Records Centre.

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

I asked a neighbour if they could save any small mammals caught by their cat, and they brought two Common Shrews in the first week. I am hoping that it doesn't continue at that rate!

Hilary Marshall 29 June 2023

With thanks to Dr Sam Browett and The Mammal Society

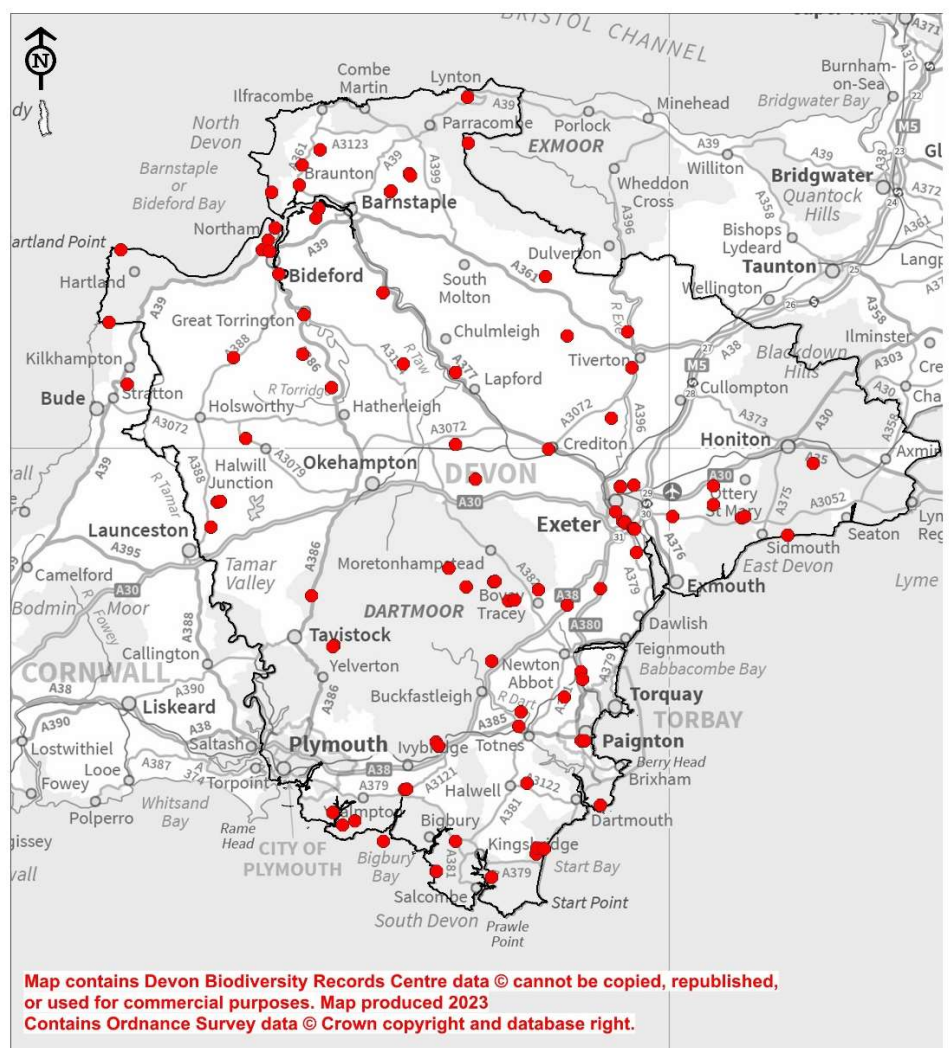
## Shrews postscript

In May DMG was contacted by Steve Davey, who found this Water Shrew (below left) *Neomys fodiens* in woodland he owns close to the River Lemon on Dartmoor. The woodland also has three small wildlife ponds. It's a noteworthy record, because the current status and distribution of Water Shrew in Devon are largely unknown. Over Summer 2023, DBRC is carrying out surveys of some sites, such



Photo: S Davey

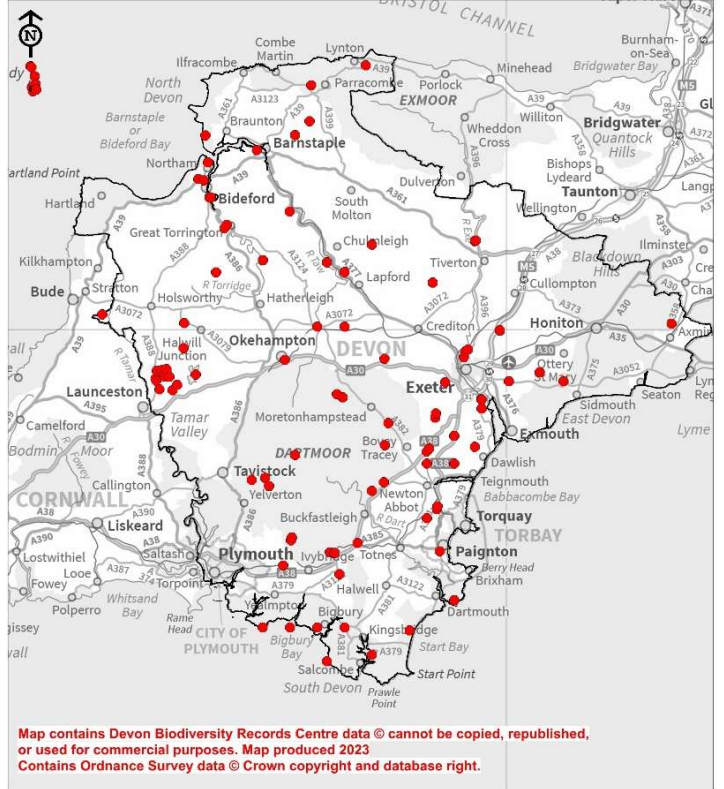
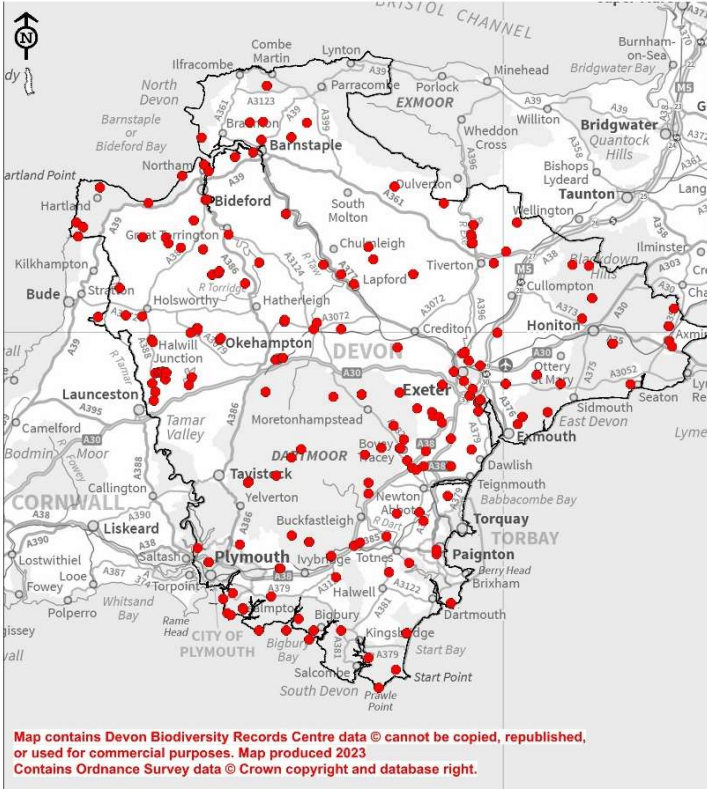
## Water Shrew Records 1971-2023



as Mincinglake in Exeter. The method is relatively simple, involving leaving out baited tubes alongside watercourses, in the aim of collecting droppings; these are distinctive enough, from certain prey remains and other characteristics, to be identified as from Water Shrew.

All shrew records however are of value and welcomed. Current DBRC maps for all three species in Devon – no GWTS (yet?) – are right and below.

[Look out for DMG's online shrew talk event on 10 January 2024.](#)



## Further afield & off the beaten track

### The Game of the Name

Beavers are go. Fenced enclosures and captive reared or translocated Beavers are popping up across the UK (see page 6 above). But what to name your project animals?

Devon Wildlife Trust has Nora. How about Noreen (from Arabic 'light, honour') or Norbert ('north', 'bright')? Beverly is very fitting (its diminutive Buffy also appropriate, for a whittler of wood into stakes). In tribute, Derek becomes an increasingly apt name for a Beaver. There is already Anthony (after historian A. Beevor) in Pembrokeshire. At a stretch, twins could be Castor and Pollux. Or Edgar and Allan – for the Beaver quoth 'evergnaw'.

Taking a musical x German turn introduces Justin (Bieber = Beaver), or, as the family and population grows, for baroque tastes is a diverse roll call of options: Heinrich, Ignaz and Franz (Biber), or a whole dynasty available with Johann Sebastian, JC, CPE, WF and Anna Magdalena (Bark). For more modern sounds, taking to the stage could be Gary (Gnawman – and his Waterway Army?) or FB Slim (Gnawman Cook). There are some other Gnawman-derived characters too (Mailer, Tebbit, Stanley Fletcher). Down a similar channel, a militant Beaver might be General Gnawriega, and a Beaver particularly keen on contributing genes to the next generation could be Richard (Gnawkins).

Chewbarkka: respect for a high watermark of beavery punsmithery, thanks to The Beaver Trust. Further exploring this cinematic stream, blockbuster releases star Sigourney (in *Non-Alien?*) and Jean-Claude, or Dami Moore. Getting down with the kits, the latest edition of the Urban Dictionary defines 'Dammy' as: a 'social event or group of friends', from a street abbreviation of 'dammit', or alternatively from Nepalese for 'great, wonderful outrageous, surprising, impressive'.

A dammy crew, to be reviewed, – and why not? – by Barry (Gnawman).



Photomashed from Country Life & DISNEY/Lucasfilm images

## Freya the Walrus immortalised ‘for our sins’

One day she’s touring north west Europe, dropping by Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands and the south coast of England, or hauling out on boats at Oslo Fjord harbour on Norway’s south eastern coast. Next she is euthanised, claimed to be for reasons of her own welfare, and that of the crowds of human fans who ignored warnings to respect her personal space. The latter sealed the fate of Freya, the ~5 year old, sub-adult Walrus in August 2022, following occasions of a bathing area being closed off after a beachgoer was chased into the water, and large gatherings of Walrus spotters and selfie-takers approaching within touching distance, putting themselves and Freya, a 600-900kg marine mammal with diminishing wariness of humans, at risk.

Walrus are legally protected. Widespread anger at this ultimate solution taken by the Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries prompted Erik Holm to campaign and crowdfund \$25,000 (£19,000) for a commemorative artistic response.



Left: Suitably bronzed

Unveiling the statue ‘For Our Sins’ near one of Freya’s regular resting spots at Oslo marina, Sat 29 April. Campaign organiser Erik Holm on the right.

Photo: Reuters (via website sources below)

Freya was named after the Norse goddess of beauty and love, and a publicly cherished wild animal with a social media profile; amid the outrage was also despair, that co-existence with the 21st century Anthropocene was not possible. A life-size bronze sculpture has been created, permanently memorialising Freya in a well-memed pose, lying resting on her side, at one of her favoured basking spots on Oslo marina. "I started this because I'm furious about the way the Fisheries Directorate and the state handled this situation," Erik Holm told news agencies at the statue's unveiling. "Beyond the issue of Freya, we need to ask ourselves how we treat animals and nature. We need to think about our relationship to wildlife". The statue's sculptor Astri Tonoian worked on the project "almost for free", as an issue close to her heart. "In my head, my goal was to make an immortal symbol of people's ability to mistreat not just wildlife but also humans .... This is how we treated Freya. And so, I will call the statue For Our Sins". She explained that the statue is not intended as a criticism of specific authorities but instead to "question the system" as a whole, and to serve as a "three-dimensional history lesson": "The authorities could have acted more quickly and tried to move her instead of shooting her. They waited too long and it became dangerous for the people. They decided to do the 'quick fix' ". The Fisheries Directorate told CNN that multiple solutions had been considered, including relocating Freya out of the fjord, but "the extensive complexity of such an operation made us conclude that this was not a viable option". Director General Frank Bakke-Jensen added: "We have great regard for animal welfare, but human life and safety must take precedence."



Freya fans. Photo issued by Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries

Sources: [BBC news](#), [Metro](#) and [CNN](#) websites

# Angry otters

A Sea Otter *Enhydra lutris* has been hijacking surfboards at Cowell Beach, Santa Cruz, central California. In July, photographer Mark Woodward (@NativeSantaCruz) posted photos (see below) and videos of southern Sea Otters (the Californian subspecies *E. l. nereis*) sitting or gnawing on the usurped boards, with one individual, a five year old female Sea Otter known as 841, involved in several incidents.

The reason for the unusual behaviour is unexplained and not understood, though may be associated with hormones or past feeding by, and developing a familiarity with, humans; 841's mother was removed from the wild following aggression towards people as a similar result of being fed. 841 was born in captivity, then tagged and monitored on release. It is reported that wildlife agencies previously intervened in 2022 when 841 first began interacting with humans. In May 2022 she was observed with a pup after returning to the Santa Cruz area.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife and Monterey Bay Aquarium aim to capture and re-locate 841, in the meantime warning surfers, kayakers and other water users not to approach or encourage encounters with the Sea Otter.

Native Santa Cruz  
@NativeSantaCruz · Follow

Enter the water at your own risk!  
I was talking with a reporter when a City employee walked up and posted this sign

8:01 PM · Jul 11, 2023



Left: Chair of the board

photographs by Mark Woodward (@NativeSantaCruz) accompanying his tweet / X July 9 2023:

*"This may seem cute but it's not, this sea otter was very aggressive and the surfer actually abandoned his board and swam to shore. I believe this is the same otter as in my previous photos, though I understand there was a second otter on the board at first"*

Sources: [The Guardian](#) and [USA Today](#) websites, Mark Woodward @NativeSantaCruz

## Tail ends

**Thank you** to all contributors to this newsletter. Articles and ideas for articles are always welcome. If you are involved in a project that would be of interest to a DMG audience, or could offer volunteering opportunities for DMG members, please contact the DMG committee. A special appeal is made to any DMG members who would be willing to help with the compilation of the newsletter.

Please contact the DMG committee by e-mailing [contact@devonmammalgroup.org](mailto:contact@devonmammalgroup.org)

## Upcoming DMG events – see announcements, website & Facebook and for full details in due course

Wed 25 October evening  
talk by Rupert Kirkwood

### Up the Creek and All at Sea .... Watching Wildlife from my Kayak



including Porpoise, dolphins, Minke and Humpback Whales, Otter, Beaver, Stoat and swimming deer and Badger... all filmed from the kayak seat

Wed 10 January 2024 evening

### Shrews by Diana Dechmann

Online talk - a joint event with  
Cornwall Mammal Group



Photo: Adobe Stock #5353909

Tues 19 March 2024 evening

### The UK Squirrel Accord talk by Kay Haw

UK Squirrel Accord is a nationwide partnership of 41 leading conservation and forestry organisations, Government agencies and companies working with voluntary red squirrel groups <https://squirrelaccord.uk/>



Photo: Nicholas Box / Squirrel Accord

At time of writing, The Mammal Society offer an online mini-course on **Bank Voles**, featuring the basics of their ecology and a small quiz at the end.

Take the mini-course at  
<https://mammal.org.uk/flipbook/Mini-courses/Bank-voles/>



### People's Trust for Endangered Species conference 'Dormice in a changing world'

University of Reading Thurs 11 Nov 2023 10am-4.30pm

Aimed at Dormouse monitors but open to all. Devon and DMG members are well represented, with speakers on University of Exeter PhD projects, Dormouse population status, monitoring and hibernation studies, hedgerows and opportunities for environmental net gain.

£40 for NDMP volunteers, from £75 for others; booking and more details at

[PTES National Dormouse conference 11 Nov 2023](#)

