

Programme of Events October 1999 to March 2000

Please bring wellies and waterproofs for outdoor events. Sorry, no dogs.

Saturday 16 October 1999: DORMOUSE NUT HUNT

Join the Forestry Commission's Ranger for Stoke Woods and Devon Mammal Group members to search for signs of Dormice.

Meet at Stoke Woods top car park, (SX924958) Pennsylvania Road at 2pm.

Free to all. No need to book, but please ring Ian Parsons on (01392) 832262 for more details.

Sunday 24 October 1999: RED DEER WATCH

A mid morning start to find Red Deer at the height of the rut.

Meet at 10am, at St.Nicholas Priory (SS928290) on the A396 near Dulverton.

Members 50p, non-members £1.

Please book with Gary Mock on (01271) 377194.

Saturday 30 October 1999: NATIONAL BADGER DAY

Look out for local events. Contact NFBG on (0207) 4983220.

Saturday 4 December 1999: MAMMALS IN FOCUS

An all day symposium with expert speakers on a range of South West mammals from Wild Boar to Otters.

10am-5pm Newman Theatre, Stocker Road, Exeter University.

Members £10, non-members £12.

See Enclosed Flyer for Symposium Programme.

Booking essential: Contact George Bemment on (01803) 874028.

Wednesday 26 January 2000 OPERATION OTTER UPDATE

(provisional date): *Mary-Rose Lane, co-ordinator of Devon Wildlife Trust's countywide otter surveys, will give us the low-down on the results so far.*

7.30pm Okehampton Church Hall, Market Street, Okehampton.

Members 50p, non-members £1.

No need to book, but for more details ring Gary Mock on (01271) 377194.

Sunday 12 March 2000: MAMMALS ON THE MOOR

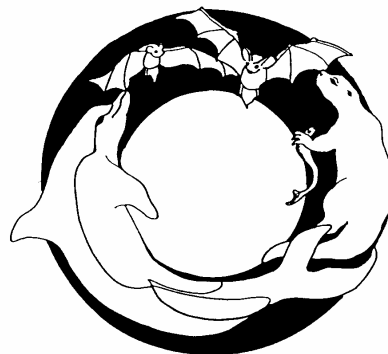
Field meeting to look for tracks and signs of Harvest Mice, Dormice Deer and other mammals.

Meet 2pm in the lay-by at Witheridge Moor Cross (SS859150).

Members 50p, non-members £1.

No need to book but for more details contact Gary Mock (01271) 377194

We are planning other indoor and field meetings, including a kids event in early May.



Newsletter No. 1

October 1999

Welcome to the first Devon Mammal Group newsletter keeping you in touch with local and national events.

Mike Williams, Chairman of the new group said "We want readers to use the newsletter to share their ideas, knowledge and experiences".

Send contributions to:
Vicky Tanner-Tremaine
Devon Mammal Group
Newsletter Editor, 3 East
Wonford Hill, Exeter EX4
4DA.

Devon Mammal Group



Photo: The Wildlife Trusts / Environment Agency

Water Voles Need You - and we need your help to find out where they remain in Devon. See inside pages.

FEATURES

- ☆ Successful Launch of New Group
- ☆ Where are Our Water Voles ?
- ☆ Mammal Records Please !
- ☆ Who's Who on the Steering Committee
- ☆ Dormice get a Helping Hand
- ☆ Contact List
- ☆ Events

Successful Launch of New Group

A *BIG* thank-you to more than seventy people who made it to the launch of the Group at Okehampton in April. They enjoyed several entertaining and informative talks. If you missed the launch all is not lost as we are planning further mammal talks around Devon.

A committee of willing volunteers has been working hard on developing a way forward for the Group. If you'd like to know who we are see *Who's Who on the Committee?* Our first task was to establish a clear role and to do that we have set ourselves a single core objective:

"To further the conservation and understanding of mammals in Devon"

Our aim to achieve this by:

- Raising awareness and understanding of the conservation of mammals throughout the county
- Supporting and encouraging mammal recording within Devon
- Providing training and information on mammal surveying and recording
- Co-ordinating and publicising mammal surveys throughout the county
- Carrying out and promoting conservation action to protect and enhance Devon's mammal populations
- Bringing together people with an interest in mammals

The Group will only achieve these aims if we can attract sufficient members. We have made a good start, but we must continue to grow. Enclosed with this newsletter is a membership leaflet - If you are not yet a member, please consider joining us. If you have already joined then please pass the leaflet onto a friend.

You will have noticed the Group's new logo on the front of this newsletter and on the leaflet. It has been designed by Kate Owen and includes mammals for which Devon is particularly important as well as reflecting our intention to cover mammals from land sea and air. Incidentally Kate has also been working on another piece of artwork - but you'll have to wait for a later newsletter to see that!

I found a freshly dead adult mole (a perfect specimen) and we found plenty more signs of squirrel. Our mammal list was growing but still no signs of dormice. Towards the end of our nest box housekeeping (a filthy job!) we struck lucky. Beneath a tit's nest in one fairly inaccessible nest box was a small but perfectly formed dormouse nest. Hurray! The Final piece of evidence to persuade us that a nest box scheme was likely to help a small resident population to increase.

NOW IT'S OVER TO YOU! We need to get a team of volunteers to make the 100 boxes that we want to put up. An event (or two) building boxes will be organised for early spring 2000. I am trying to get funding to buy all the wood and nails etc. but any offers of suitable wood are welcomed.

(Philippa Burrell, Devon Biodiversity Records Centre)

CONTACTS

Records: *Send your mammal records to:*

Phillipa Burrell
Devon Biodiversity Record Centre
Devon Wildlife Trust,
Shirehampton House
35-37 St. David's Hill
EXETER
EX4 4DA

General Mammal Group Enquiries:

Gary Mock (Secretary),
Devon Mammal Group
37 Sowden Park
BARNSTAPLE
EX32 8EH
☎ daytime 01271 312641
evenings 01271 377194

Water Vole Recording Scheme: *Please send Water Vole records to:*

Mary-Rose Lane
Rivers and Wetlands Officer
Devon Wildlife Trust
Shirehampton House
35-37 St. David's Hill
EXETER
EX4 4DA

Membership Queries:

Vicky Tanner-Tremaine
(Membership Secretary)
Devon Mammal Group
3 East Wonford Hill
Heavitree
EXETER
EX1 3BS
☎ daytime 01392 279244,
evenings 01392 432626

The Steering Committee, So Who's Who ?

Here's a taster of who is on the committee working for you....

Mike Williams (*Chairman*) - I'm a professional ecologist for the Environment Agency (Devon Area), where I cover not only wildlife but landscape, archaeology and recreation. My interests are similarly broad-based which helps! I'm keen on dragonflies, butterflies and birds as well as having a lifelong interest in mammals, particularly otters, water voles and mink. I've been closely involved with the Environment Agency's work on otter post-mortems for 6 years.

Gary Mock - (*Secretary*) I'm a civil servant by day, mammologist by night! I used to study badgers in the Scottish Highlands and was a committee member of the Devon Badger Group. I have a particular interest in mustelids (members of the weasel family). I believe Devon Mammal Group can make a real difference to peoples understanding of mammals in Devon, and actively further mammal conservation.

Philippa Burrell (*Records Officer and Devon Wildlife Trust representative*) - I've been working in environmental recording since 1981, with a four year spell of environmental education and natural history curator work in the 1980s. My natural history interests are broad but mammals have always had a particular fascination for me. Before I moved to Devon I was a committee member of the Avon Bat Group and chair of the Avon Badger Group. My main "crusade" as a member of the Devon Mammal Group is to ensure that we have good information about the status and distribution of Devon's mammals - but I'm also looking forward to getting involved in some practical mammal conservation projects.

Vicky Tanner-Tremaine (*Membership Secretary & Newsletter Editor*) - Having graduated in 1996 with a degree in Environmental Biology, I worked for Norfolk Wildlife Trust as a Conservation Assistant, moving to Devon in November last year. I began volunteering in Devon Biodiversity Record Centre (DBRC) in January where I soon became involved in the preparations for the launch of Devon Mammal Group. My role in DBRC includes managing the Badger Recording Scheme and answering enquiries from members of the public. I am really keen to ensure our members have ample opportunity to express their views and ideas about mammal conservation and to influence the activities of the group.

Sue Searle - I have run the Exeter Wildlife Watch Group for 3 years and am involved with other environmental education projects in Devon, mainly involving children. I work part-time for Devon Conservation Forum and am studying for a Biology degree at Exeter University. I have taken part in Operation Otter and recently spent two weeks in Sri Lanka studying primate behaviour.

Alison Cox - For the last 6 years I have been working for Devon Wildlife Trust, initially as Conservation Officer but more recently as Wildlife Sites Officer for the north and east of the county. My job involves providing advice to landowners on how to manage their land in a more wildlife friendly way. Often this includes advice about mammals. I was also involved in the Devon Badger Group and am still an active member of the Devon Bat Group and I am an English Nature Bat Warden. I am very keen to see the new Devon Mammal Group bring together people in the county who share my interest in mammals and to provide a focus for events and activities in the future.

Ian Parsons - I have a strong passion for wildlife, especially mammals, my particular interests are dormice and Mustelids (badgers, stoats, weasels and mink etc.). I have worked as a Ranger for the Forestry Commission for almost 6 years and currently I am based on the Haldon Hills. I hope that I will have ample opportunity to contribute my knowledge and skills to make the Devon Mammal Group a huge success.

Alan Hopkins - My interest in natural history is lifelong and universal. As a veterinary Surgeon, now retired from full time general practice, I spent my working life mainly with domestic animals, plus occasional wild birds and mammals. For the past 23 years I have also formed an association with my son and have made considerable efforts to create and improve wildlife habitats on my farm. As a member of the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group I am acutely aware of the contribution farming has made, can and will make to our flora and fauna.

Roger Crouch - I am a founder member of both the Mid Devon Natural History Society and the Devon Branch of Butterfly Conservation. Currently I am involved with the management of a large Culm grassland site and associated woodlands. Devon's mammals have been neglected for far too long, I see the formation of this group as being the progressive way forward in rectifying this.

Dormice in North Devon get a helping hand.

Soon after the first invitations to the Okehampton launch of the Devon Mammal Group went out, I got a telephone call asking if the Group could help to make a North Devon woodland more dormouse-friendly. Time for action already! At the launch when I asked for help for dormice in North Devon I quickly gathered half a dozen names of willing volunteers.

In August this small group of volunteers spent a day in the woods near Bratton Fleming, searching for signs of dormice. The landowner, Ray, has been steadily transforming the beautiful old oak woodland - removing the thick barren jungle of alien rhododendron, replacing it with a more wildlife-friendly mix of native plants. The majority of planting Ray has done is the food mainstay of the dormouse - hazel - and in many sections of the wood this has started to form the arching understory which dormice prefer.

My first impression of the woodland on the steep valley slope was “*This is a fabulous wood but really not much good for dormice*” - the first section is a stand of beautiful tall straight oak trees and a woodland floor with magnificent ferns, but no understory at all! All the text books say that dormice must have a substantial understory of small trees and shrubs in order to move around without visiting the ground. Walking a little further I realised that the woods seemed vaguely familiar - tall, bare-trunked oaks with a fairly continuous leafy canopy high above our heads - where did it remind me of? Of course! The woods near Okehampton where Gordon Vaughan has put up many nest boxes for pied flycatchers and managed to act as landlord to several hundred dormice over the years!

The woodland structure varied and we next visited areas which were more like classic dormouse territory (tall standard trees with a thick understory of hazel and bramble). Searching under the many hazels revealed cracked nuts opened by squirrels. I spotted honeysuckle plants throughout the woodland, plenty of oak and some ash - all plants which dormice are known to use for nest material and as a continuous supply of food. By the time we finished exploring and stopped for lunch we were hopeful that the site might be suitable for dormice but had found no signs that they actually agreed with our assessment and were using it - though Ray had seen one nest many years ago.

In the afternoon we checked all of the bird nesting boxes put up by Ray. Some of the carefully constructed bird's nests which we cleared out of the boxes had badger hair woven in and one had roe deer hair incorporated.

Where are Our Voles ? The water vole (*Arvicola terrestris*) has suffered a dramatic population decline over the last 50 years or so owing to a number of factors including habitat loss and predation by American mink. Mary-Rose Lane of Devon Wildlife Trust is interested both in records of sightings from recent years as well as any information about areas where you may remember seeing water voles in the past. So its time to get out those old notebooks and see if you have any records for her! You can even use the species recording form enclosed with this issue. Records will be used to target new areas for conservation action. (Ed.)

Mammal Records Please!

People are beginning to send in mammal records and to ask questions about recording. So! Here are some instructions and a simple form is enclosed, along with forms and instructions specifically for recording badgers and their sets.

An environmental record has four core elements:

WHO WHAT WHEN WHERE

If any of these four elements are missing the record is not valid (think about it!).

WHO - usually you, (the recorder), please make sure that your full name is on your record and full address if I don't already know you (and even if I do, give me a big clue otherwise I could ascribe your record to someone else with the same name!)

WHAT - is the animal you've seen. If you are not *absolutely* sure about what you saw, then do **not** guess and record your guess as fact. You can still make a record even if you are not absolutely sure of your identification all you need to do is to give a description and say clearly that you are not sure. You don't have to put the Latin name, common names are usually fine for British mammals.

WHEN - The more precise the date the better - BUT a range of dates (12-18th June 1999) or a broad date (1999) for older records is acceptable. Record to the best degree of accuracy that you can manage.

WHERE - This always causes the most trouble! it is the location of the animal when you saw it. *Please* give a description of where the location is (e.g. “on the old A30 between Okehampton and Sticklepath, 1.2 miles east of Okehampton Hospital”) and a grid reference if you can. A sketch map can often be very helpful to enable us to work out a grid reference. More about grid references in the next newsletter!

Thank you to everyone who has already sent in records. Don't forget that you can ask me for data as well as sending it in!

I will be writing an article for the next newsletter all about recording the status and distribution of mammals, why we want to, how to do it, how you can help and what use we will make of the records.

(Philippa Burrell, Devon Biodiversity Records Centre)

Send your records to: Devon Biodiversity Records Centre.