



## Information for use of Small Mammal Traps

(Based on: Gurnell, J., and Flowerdew, JR. 2019. 'Live Trapping Small Mammals'. Mammal Society Occasional Publications, Vol.3, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed.)

**NB:** Please be aware that Devon Mammal Group does not accept any responsibility for the health and safety of those borrowing small mammal traps. Our insurance does not cover your activity. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are suitably competent to conduct activities using small mammal traps, and to seek permissions from land owners.

**Prior to survey:** check that each trap is clean and that the treadle of each trap works. Do not use faulty traps, as this may result in the death or injury of small mammals. Whilst Devon Mammal Group checks the traps on return, it is the responsibility of those conducting the survey, to ensure the traps are in good working order before use.

**Before and After Survey:** please make sure that the traps cleaned and are stored with the doors locked shut so that you don't inadvertently trap small mammals in your garage/shed!

### **When setting up the traps:**

#### **Food and bedding**

- Food and bedding should be placed in the nest box part of the traps.
- Hay and non-absorbent cotton wool are the best types of bedding material but alternatives such as strips of paper or paper tissue may be used. Cotton wool can help to significantly reduce mortality in shrews. It is essential that the bedding is dry, and there is plenty of it, ensure that the nest box is well stuffed.
- Provide the following food: Rolled oats or wheat (approx. 1 tablespoon); 3-4 pieces of apple or carrot for moisture; shrew food.
- It is vital that shrews are provided with food. We recommend the use of casters (blow-fly larvae available from fishing tackle shops) or mealworms (live mealworms that have been frozen to kill them, NOT dried mealworms).

#### **Deploying your traps**

- To make traps easier to find again, mark out trap positions with cane, or tape.
- Place traps alongside natural objects, such as tree trunks, fallen branches or logs, or under low shrubs, bushes or grass tussocks.
- Place the trap so that the trap entrance is flush with the ground and stable. It may be necessary to clear away a little leaf litter or grass to achieve this, and occasionally the nest box may need some support at the back. Try to keep the nest box slightly elevated compared with the tunnel, as this helps moisture to drain out.
- A little leaf litter or grass placed over the nest box to minimise excesses of heat and cold and to help conceal the trap from passers-by. Before leaving, sprinkle a little bait in and around the trap entrance.
- During the pre-bait period, activate the pre-bait catch. Be sure to turn it off during the trapping period!

### Checking your traps

- Check traps at least twice a day in the morning and evening. If possible, try to make another check at midday to reduce shrew mortality.
- Take a spare bag of bedding and food when checking traps so that damp bedding can be replaced and food replenished.

### Species Recording

- Empty any closed traps into a large polythene bag, at least 50 cm deep.
- If you have captured a small mammal, the first thing to do is identify the species. **NB: in most cases this will be all that is required, and the animal can be released following the last two bullet points shown below. Please do not handle small mammals unless absolutely necessary.**

#### **If further data is required:**

- **Only if Necessary:** Remove the animal from the bag, by orientating it so that its head is in the corner of the bag. Slide in a hand over the back of the animal and grip it by the scruff of the neck with the thumb and forefinger, taking care not to restrict the animal's breathing. When the animal is firmly held, remove it from the bag. If the animal struggles hold it gently against your coat. **Please note:** the skin on the tail of the wood mouse and yellow-necked mouse is easily pulled off so these animals should never be picked up by the tail. Whilst in hand, note the sex and if possible, the breeding condition of the mammal.
- Place into a small plastic bag, twist the neck of the bag taking care not to trap any part of the small mammal, or pre-weighed container – again ensuring that you do not trap any part of the small mammal. Weigh the small mammal. Please ensure that the mammal is not held in a bag for longer than absolutely necessary, and is kept in the shade during warmer weather.

#### **In all cases:**

- **Release it carefully**, watching the direction in which it runs. All participants should stand still until the small mammal is clear, to avoid it being trodden on!
- Record all data for each small mammal, and send a copy of this data to Devon mammal Group, along with the date and location.

**Please make sure that the traps are cleaned before you return them, thank you.**

### **EXTRA GUIDANCE**

#### **YouTube Videos**

Introducing the Longworth Trap:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0w2stGYtzNc>

Setting the pre-bait catch on a Longworth trap:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C952Riv6Pgc>

Trapping Shrews - Special advice for their care while trapping:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96J0ru2myRU>

## Species Information

**Wood Mouse** - <https://www.mammal.org.uk/species-hub/full-species-hub/discover-mammals/species-wood-mouse/>

**Yellow-necked mouse** - <https://www.mammal.org.uk/species-hub/full-species-hub/discover-mammals/species-yellow-necked-mouse/>

**Harvest mouse** - <https://www.mammal.org.uk/species-hub/full-species-hub/discover-mammals/species-harvest-mouse/>

**Bank vole** - <https://www.mammal.org.uk/species-hub/full-species-hub/discover-mammals/species-bank-vole/>

**Field vole** - <https://www.mammal.org.uk/species-hub/full-species-hub/discover-mammals/species-field-vole/>

**Common Shrew** - <https://www.mammal.org.uk/species-hub/full-species-hub/discover-mammals/species-common-shrew/>

**Pygmy shrew** - <https://www.mammal.org.uk/species-hub/full-species-hub/discover-mammals/species-pygmy-shrew/>

**Water shrew** - <https://www.mammal.org.uk/species-hub/full-species-hub/discover-mammals/species-water-shrew/>

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

### In summary

Basic hygiene when carrying out fieldwork is essential. It is advisable to wear surgical gloves when handling captured animals or collecting faeces. Always wash your hands after fieldwork or use antiseptic gels or wipes. It is a good idea to ensure that your tetanus inoculation is up to date. Take the usual precautions when working in the field, especially if your site is remote. Ensure you have warm and waterproof clothing and footwear. If possible carry a mobile phone and always let someone else know where you will be working and when you expect to return.

### Diseases

Volunteers may be exposed to disease during survey work.

Handling of faecal material from wild small mammals presents no danger of disease provided that reasonable precautions are taken to minimise any possible risks. Remember to wash your hands after collecting the bait tubes and traps from the sites and after extracting faeces, and especially before eating, drinking and smoking.

Cuts or abrasions on the hands should be covered by sticking plaster or rubber gloves. Take particular care at sites where brown rats are common, since here there may be a risk of Weil's disease.

To reduce the risk of spreading disease, ensure footwear and outdoor clothing is cleaned before and after fieldwork. Follow any bio-security measures present on the land you are surveying, e.g. use disinfecting mats at gates etc.

If disease is expected or you feel unwell at any time after carrying out your survey then consult your doctor immediately explaining the type of fieldwork you have been involved in, including details of the mammal species that you have come into contact with. While not common, the following diseases can have severe effects and in rare cases can cause death:

- 1. Tetanus** - This is caused by the bacterium *Clostridium tetani*, a common micro-organism found in soil. The infection of minor wounds and scratches can result in tetanus. All skin wounds should be covered before fieldwork is commenced and anti-tetanus treatments should be kept up to date. Always wash your hands after completing field work and before eating, drinking and smoking.

**2. Leptospirosis (Weil's disease)** - This bacterium is carried by rodents, particularly rats, and is excreted by their urine. This disease is commonly found in water and as for tetanus ensure that all wounds are covered and avoid contact with water that may have been contaminated by rat or cow urine. Longworth trapping, hair tubes and bait tubes are also possible reservoirs for Weil's disease. Wash hands thoroughly before eating, drinking and smoking. If you suffer from flu-like symptoms following field work, contact your doctor immediately and mention Weil's disease.

**3. Lyme disease** - The bacterium that causes Lyme disease is transmitted via the ticks of various species including deer, sheep and pheasants. When surveying in long grass or forested areas with thick undergrowth wear long trousers and long socks. On completing field work check exposed skin for ticks and if found remove. If a tick is found and you contract flu like symptoms contact your doctor and explain that you may have been exposed to Lyme disease.

**4. Tick-borne encephalitis** - This is a viral disease carried by animal ticks. There is a vaccine for this disease if prolonged exposure to tick-infested areas is a possibility. In Britain and Ireland a similar disease known as 'Louping ill' is also present. This is particularly associated with grouse and hares in moorland regions and has similar symptoms to tick-borne encephalitis ranging from flu-like symptoms to severe symptoms requiring hospitalisation.

**5. Salmonellosis** - This bacterial infection is common in rats and mice. If the bacterium is ingested as a result of poor hygiene, then mild to severe food poisoning will occur.