



Spring 2005

CHESHIRE MAMMAL NEWS

Welcome to the relaunch of the Cheshire Mammal Group (CMAg) Newsletter.

CMAg was established in 2001 and aims to encourage the study, conservation and to raise awareness of, the mammal species in the Cheshire region. We now have a well-established pattern of meetings (every three months) and events, and are working towards the launch of the first mammal atlas for Cheshire in 2007. We have a small committee working to coordinate the groups activities, and a number of brave volunteers who are in the process of designing our new website.

We launched our Events Programme in January 2005 with an 'Introduction to the Mammals of Cheshire' at Risley Moss LNR. This event was well attended and introduced people to the wide range of mammals found in Cheshire from the whales and seals found off our small piece of coast line at the Wirral, to the ever increasing numbers of bat species now recorded in the county. Further events looked at field signs for water vole, and a trip to the reintroduction site for the dormouse. Everyone has enjoyed these days and the programme continues through the summer with more field-based workshops on bats, small mammals and deer. Please come and join us if you can. If you're feeling more adventurous the Mammal Society and the Field Studies Council both run field courses based on mammals and more information can be found on their web sites.

As well as our events programme our other main theme for the future is mammal recording. The information from mammal surveys and incidental records will form the basis for a book on the 'Mammals of Cheshire' which we hope to have ready for publication by Spring 2007. There are over 50 species of mammal recorded for Cheshire, including a few sightings of the rare and elusive mustelid *Martes martes* (better known to you and I as the Pine Marten!) but records of the more common species such as the grey squirrel and rabbit are just as important. Records are very important to show us changes in numbers for different species, the impacts of proposed developments, and with a view to helping the mammals of Cheshire there are now nine Species Action Plans that can be seen on <http://www.cheshire-biodiversity.org.uk/menu-species.htm>. Once you have your new found field skills why not join us to survey for Cheshire's Mammals ~ the BAP groups are working on a programme of survey days for both water voles and otters - information on these days will be advertised on the Cheshire Wildlife Trust web site as well as the new CMAg web site once it's up and running (<http://www.record-irc.co.uk/rECOrd.aspx?Mod=Article&ArticleID=G00010001>).

More help and enthusiasm is always needed and most welcome, so if you would like to get involved please contact us at the CMaG website, currently found on the rECOrd web site, or come along to one of our meetings

The next meeting will be on Saturday 9th July, Grebe House, start 10.30 am - all welcome.



MAMMALS OF CHESHIRE

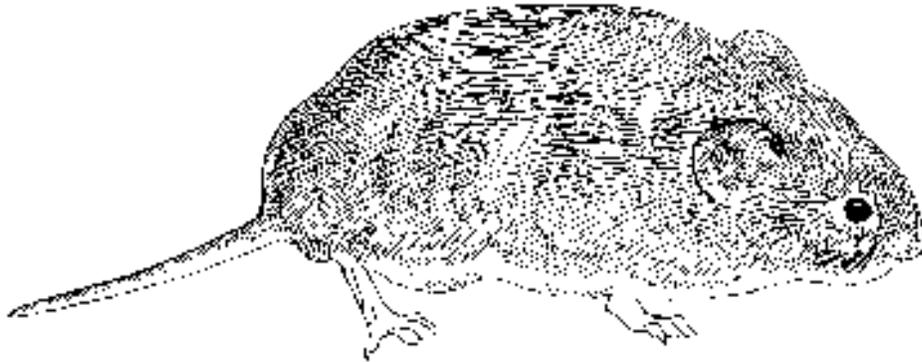
Work has been progressing well on this publication, the format has been decided, this will be based on John Dobson's 'Mammals of Essex'. There will be chapters on the habitats of Cheshire, Cheshire's mammals in their historical context, a review of mammal surveying and recording within the county and species accounts of currently found in the county as well as those recently extinct. The species accounts will include information on the identification, biology, distribution, historical context (within Cheshire and UK as a whole) and status, there will also be maps showing where the species has been recorded within the county. The species have been grouped according to order each with its own co-ordinator. The book will be illustrated by colour photographs and line drawings, there will also be appendices covering tracks, feeding signs etc. It is intended to have the publication completed by spring 2007 to coincide with a major launch event.

The main requirement is now to collect as many records as possible to improve the accuracy of the text and distribution maps, to this end the following action has been decided;

- Produce flyer to request records, to be sent out with newsletters also to be sent to libraries, visitor centres etc
- Produce articles for magazines such as 'The Grebe', 'Cheshire Life', 'Chester Zoo News' etc
- Identify sources of historic data
- Acquire data from national surveys e.g. BTO mammal data, NBMP data, Mammal Society surveys etc
- Organise site visits at selected sites to attempt to fill in existing gaps
- Update website to allow sightings to be entered directly

Records need not be just for live sightings, road casualties, cat victims, owl pellets, and tracks and signs are all acceptable for inclusion. There should be enough expertise within the group to sort out any identification problems. The group has a number of live mammal traps available for loan to anyone wishing to carry out their own surveys.

We have produced a matrix from our existing records which lists mammals so far recorded in each 10km square within the county along with the most recent date that the species has been recorded. Hopefully this will help in targeting survey work and stimulate recording from individuals living in or around that particular area. The intention is to collect as much data as possible up to the end of November 2006, ideally we are looking for at least 20 species from each 10km square. The final maps will be based on distribution by tetrads (2km squares) apart from certain sensitive species which may be less precise.



Bank Vole

DORMOUSE DAY

The dormouse is probably the rarest mammal in Cheshire - there is only one known population in Cheshire. It is also arguably the most charismatic - although I know some of you will disagree. Despite being rare it is an animal that has been closely studied, and the Cheshire population is closely monitored. To enable more people to be involved in this we held a dormouse training day in February. The first half of the day was in the classroom, with a general introduction to the dormouse, its behaviour, ecology and conservation. The background and current status of the Cheshire Dormouse Project was also explained. After lunch participants got "hands on" down at the dormouse wood. At this time of year the dormice are in hibernation. They hibernate in special nests at or below ground level, leaving the nest boxes vacant, so this is an ideal time to carry out maintenance on the nest boxes. Most of the nest boxes are several years old now, many needed repairs and some needed replacing. This is a big job but many hands made light work. The course attendees found themselves putting up new boxes, carrying out on-site repairs to existing boxes, fitting new securing wires, sliding down slippery banks, and enjoying one of the most beautiful pieces of woodland in Cheshire (my opinion - I know I'm biased).

The event proved popular, and was fully booked several weeks in advance. However there will be many future opportunities for people who want to help with the project,

and actually see this beautiful animal for themselves. By the time you read this the spring monitoring will be complete, but we will be checking the population again in September and October, and all offers of help will be very welcome. In addition we hope to be helping to check a Welsh dormouse population, somewhere near Ruthin. This is part of a research project being organised by Cheshire Wildlife Trust, CCW and Chester Zoo, which we hope will tell us much more about these intriguing creatures. If you would like to be involved contact Sue Tatman (01270 610180, statman@cheshirewt.cix.co.uk).

We will be counting dormice at Stockton Dingle on Mon 13th June and Mon 11th July (to be confirmed), contact Sue for details.



*Hibernating Dormouse
(Sue Tatman)*

BATS GET A NEW HOME

Nine species of bat have been recorded in Cheshire. They are the;

- Pipistrelle (Common and Soprano)
- Daubentons
- Brown Long-eared
- Noctule
- Whiskered
- Brandts
- Leislars
- Natterers

All bat species receive full protection under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW(2000)). Bat species are further protected under Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, & c.) Regulations (1994), which extends their protection to their roosts and hibernacula.

All bat species found in the UK are declining. The decline has been a sharp one throughout this century. The Pipistrelle (although it is the most widespread species in the UK) is a UK priority species as it is declining rapidly across the rest of Europe. The remaining bat species found in Cheshire are of 'Conservation Concern' as they all have an unfavourable status across Europe.

There are many reasons for this decline in numbers. They range from;

- Habitat loss/destruction
- Changes in agricultural practice
- Loss of hibernation and roosting sites
- Inappropriate timber treatment in buildings containing bats
- Deliberate exclusion

However, there are many ways in which we can help improve the situation for bats. One such way is to provide the bats with artificial roosting/hibernation sites. At the end of April members of the Cheshire Bat Group, Cheshire Mammal Group and the Cheshire Wildlife Trust got together to erect bat boxes in Marbury Reedbed. Marbury Reedbed is one of the Wildlife Trust's nature reserves and is made up of oak/birch woodland, alder carr and reedbed, which extends into Budworth Mere. The nature reserve covers an area of 15 acres (6 ha) and is situated in the larger Marbury Country Park.

Wooden bat boxes were put up in the Wildlife Trust reserve approximately twenty years ago and were no longer effective due to weathering over time. The groups split into two teams removing what was left of the old boxes and putting up new ones in their place. The boxes were mainly roosting boxes, providing shelter and a place to rest during the day. However, two large hibernation boxes were also placed in the woodland, both of these boxes can accommodate up to seventy hibernating bats. A few of the boxes were wooden though some were made out of a new material 'woodcrete' which is a tougher wood/concrete mix and should provide the bats with a suitable roosting/hibernation site for many years to come. Care was taken to place the boxes as high up as possible in the trees and also to have the boxes facing south/west so that they warmed up during the day.

These boxes will be monitored throughout the summer months with the help of the Cheshire Bat Group to measure their effectiveness. There is the potential for a number of bats covering a variety of species to be found using these boxes as Pipistrelle (Common and Soprano), Noctule, Whiskered and Daubenton's bats are known to occupy the site.

Kat Walsh



Cheshire Bat Group erecting boxes at Marbury CP on the CWT reserve



THE PINE MARTIN IN CHESHIRE

The Pine Marten is one of Britain's rarest mammals. Solitary, wide-ranging and long-lived, Pine Martens seem able to maintain sparse populations where conditions are poor. This situation exists in Britain today where the limited extent of suitable woodland is a major constraint. Only in the Scottish Highlands, where rocky mountains offer extensive alternative habitats, are Pine Martens common.

There is continuing debate regarding Pine Martens in England and Wales, some argue that no viable populations exist south of the Scottish border, whilst others claim that sparse populations persist in traditional strongholds. The core range of the species in Scotland is slowly expanding but detecting the animal still remains a challenge. However, recent records from adjacent counties raise the question as to whether Pine Martens have reached Cheshire.

The Pine Marten disappeared from Cheshire probably between 1880 and 1900 following woodland clearance and persecution by gamekeepers. Evidence of Pine Martens from the more rugged parts of Wales and Northern England exists for the 20th century with reliable sightings continuing into the new millennium.

The Vincent Wildlife Trust has been recording and collating sightings of Pine Martens since the mid-1990s. This suggests populations Pine Martens existing in upland areas such as the Lake District, the Cheviots, Pennines, Snowdonia, North York Moors, the Cambrian Mountains and the uplands of central southern Wales. Sightings are backed up by dead animals and DNA extracted from Marten droppings.

The VWT has received 10 reported sightings from Cheshire since 1989 but only four were rated highly on VWT's

quality scale. The best two sightings were from near Rainow in 1992 and Cuddington in 2000, both locations on the edge of the Peak District suggesting animals on the edge of, or dispersing from, a Peak District population.

Good records continue from Derbyshire and North Staffordshire, in April 2004 a Pine Marten was photographed in a tree in the Churnet Valley near Stoke-on-trent.

Cheshire is located between traditional strongholds in northern England and North Wales, therefore may be of potential importance as a route for gene flow between these isolated populations.

Unfortunately, conditions in the county are far from ideal, especially for a species preferring areas of extensive woodland. Cheshire is less wooded than most counties and that which does exist is highly fragmented, dominated by lowland farmland, there is little by way of suitable habitat.

For the Pine Marten to exist in Cheshire there needs to be an increase in woodland cover, more links between existing woodlands and a change in management practices. There is also a shortage of old trees which offer cavities that Pine Martens use as breeding sites, long term more old woodland trees should be retained, in the short term artificial den boxes could be provided where natural sites are scarce.

The Vincent Wildlife Trust is interested in reports of wild Pine Martens seen recently in England or Wales, the address being 3 & 4 Bronsil Courtyard, Eastnor, Ledbury, HR8 1EP or e-mail vwt@vwt.org.uk.

UPDATE: OTTERS IN CHESHIRE

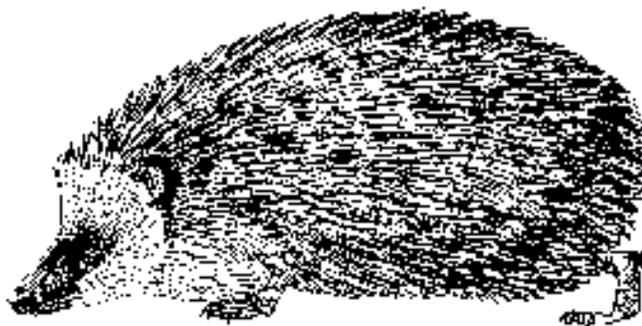
As we go to press we are awaiting the results of a recent otter survey funded by the Environment Agency in Cheshire. Consultants have surveyed over 200 sites, mostly at bridge crossings, across the County. We have our fingers crossed that the results will be good.

Otter recovery in other parts of the Country has led to a decrease in mink numbers on the same rivers, either through direct aggression (which the otter always wins!) or through displacement as the otter takes over suitable denning sites.

All is not rosy though: At the same time as good news for the recovery of otter populations across England, comes news of developing conflict with the carp fisheries. Otters are accused of taking 30lb fish (worth thousands of pounds) from these fisheries. Once again through lack of good information the otter is being painted as the baddy in relation to sport fisheries. Otters do take the occasional large fish, but where there is an abundance of smaller species they will feed more avidly on these. Wiltshire Wildlife Trust together with Earthwatch have a project looking at otter spraint. Of the bones found, the majority were very small, less than 5 mm in the vast majority, hardly that of a 30lb carp! The species are also bullheads, stickleback, perch and crayfish (signal!) for the main part with no carp yet identified.

Leaflets on how to deal with otter and mink predation are available from the Environment Agency and their fisheries officers are on hand to offer advice. For now we need to spread the word that otters are not the main predators of large carp.....poaching is more of a problem!

If you would like to get involved in conducting surveys for Otter in Cheshire, or can lend a hand with building otter holts, then please get in touch with Fiona at Cheshire Wildlife Trust on 01270 610180 or email fmahon@cheshirewt.cix.co.uk



Hedgehog

MAMMAL REPORTS

Two major reports on the status of British mammals have recently been published, one by Mammals Trust UK (MTUK), the other by the Tracking Mammals Partnership (TMP).

The MTUK report gives a brief overview of the results of recent monitoring programmes as well as a range of other mammal-related issues. The authors suggest that as a result of a number of recent high-level political initiatives there may be increasing focus on mammal-based definitions of sustainable development in Britain. Questions are being raised as how land management contributes not only to food production but how it contributes to safeguarding wildlife and people's enjoyment of it.

The fox hunting debate leaves no doubt about how philosophically central wildlife issues can be to society. It illustrates the dilemmas faced by conservationists throughout the world. Making judgements is essentially what politics is all about and, although conservation aspires to be driven by science, it is also a political game too. Observations from those wielding binoculars and notepads illuminate the minds of those who must ultimately make them into policy. Ref; **The State of Britain's Mammals 2005** by Professor David Macdonald and Dr Sandra Baker of

WildCRU, available via the Mammals Trust UK website.

The TMP report contains information on current population changes for 34 mammals, over 50% of UK land species. Ten native species (Greater Horseshoe Bat, Lesser Horseshoe Bat, Natterer's Bat, Daubentons' Bat, Common Pipistrelle, Polecat, Otter, Badger, Red Deer and Roe Deer) have increasing populations whilst four species (Mole, Whiskered Bat, Brandt's Bat and Soprano Pipistrelle) have stable populations. Three native species (Mountain Hare, Water Vole and Common Dormouse) have declined significantly.

For eight mammals (Hedgehog, Serotine, Noctule, Brown Long-eared Bat, Fox, Stoat, Weasel and Irish Hare) there is inconclusive evidence so more years data will be required, although there is evidence of a long-term decline in the UK Hedgehog population with pronounced regional declines in parts of eastern England.

Of introduced species the Rabbit is the only species suffering a clear decline, six species (Grey Squirrel, Brown Rat, Sika Deer, Fallow Deer, Muntjac and Chinese Water Deer) have probably increased with Brown hare and Mink having stable or declining populations. Ref; **UK Mammals Species Status and Population Trends** available via the Tracking Mammals Partnership website.

POPULATION ESTIMATES OF BRITISH MAMMALS

Knowledge of British mammals has increased dramatically over the last 50 years, consequently it has been possible to make more reliable estimates of many mammal species.

Badger	175,000	Revised from 215,000 in 1995
Mink	36,950	Down from 110,000 in 1995
Otter	c12,500	Up by 5,000 on previous figure
Polecat	63,200	Up from 15,000
Stoat	462,000	Stable
Weasel	450,000	Probably declining
Muntjac	128,500	Up from 40,000 in 1995
Fallow Deer	128,000	Up from 100,000 in 1995
Red Deer	316,000	Down from previous estimate of 360,000
Roe Deer	300,000	Down from previous estimate of 500,000
Grey Seal	130,000	
Common Seal	40-63,000	

The revised Badger figures are based on previous estimates being based on too many animals per sett. Mink have declined owing to the continuing recovery of the Otter, Polecats have also greatly increased; currently they are expanding their range by 4.3km per year. Of the seal species 90% are found in Scotland.



Help wanted

The Mammal Society requires reference material (skins, skulls, droppings etc) for use in their training courses. Contact Gayle Dower at the Mammal Society office; gdower@mammal.org.uk

The British Divers Marine Life Rescue are requesting sightings of marked seals, either tagged in the hind flipper or with coloured spots on their heads. These animals have been released after rehabilitation so the sightings will provide information on survivability and dispersal of released animals. Send sightings to James Barrett at james@bdmlr.org.uk

Researchers at York University are studying the colonisation history of small mammals using molecular markers, specimens of small mammals (voles, mice and shrews) are required, Contact Jeremy Searle at York University; jbs3@yor.ac.uk

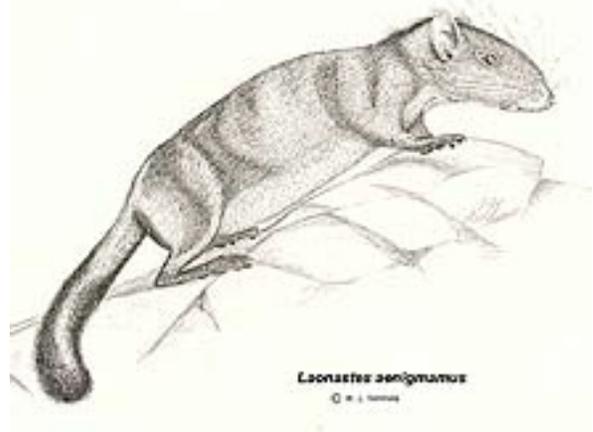


NEW RODENT DISCOVERED - on food stall

From National Geographic News.....

A new species of rodent has been discovered - for sale on a food stall in a market in south east Asia. The rock rat - or kha-nyou - is unlike any rodent seen before by scientists, reports New Scientist.

It was spotted by conservation biologist Robert Timmins in the Khammouan region of Laos. He said: "It was for sale on a table next to some vegetables. And I knew immediately it was something I had never seen before." Timmins, of the Wildlife Conservation Society, said locals prepare the rodent for eating by roasting it on a skewer.



Timmins and his team have subsequently trapped the animal with the help of local people, but have never seen it alive either in the wild or in the market. The creature looks something like a cross between a large dark rat and a squirrel, but is actually more closely related to guinea pigs. It is not closely related to any other rodents and researchers have had to create a whole new family, the Laonastidae, to accommodate it.

The last new mammal family was created in 1974 with the discovery of the bumblebee bat.

Illustration courtesy Wildlife Conservation Society

Also from National Geographic News

Did You Know?

There are about 1,500 species of rodent, the single largest group of mammals (mammal species number about 4,000, including human beings).

Rodents include mice, rats, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, beavers, muskrats, porcupines, chipmunks, squirrels, prairie dogs, chinchillas, and voles.

They are native to every continent except Antarctica. They live in trees, deserts, underground tunnels, and swamps.

While rodents are important sources of food for people in many parts of the world and are used as "guinea pigs" in biomedical research, they are often considered pests, because they eat crops, damage property, and can spread diseases to humans.

Future Events

Cheshire Mammal Group events;

- Bats with Elizabeth Barratt, Saturday 23rd July, indoor session looking at bat ecology, use of bat detectors etc. Meet at Anderton Memorial Hall 10.00am, **booking required**.
- Small Mammal Identification, Saturday 24th September, trapping session followed by indoor session looking at biology, ecology, behaviour and the law. Meet at Cedar House, Chester Zoo, 9.00am, **booking required**.

To book a place on any of the above contact Tony Parker on tony.parker@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk Bring packed lunch and suitable clothing for outdoor sessions. Charge £2.50 members, £5.00 non-members

(Deer Watch, date to be announced for September/October. Meet at Lyme Park)

Other Bat/mammal events in Cheshire;

- Harvest Mouse monitoring; next trapping sessions July 18th - 22nd, October 3rd - 7th and 17th - 21st. Contact Penny Rudd (01244 650215)
- Bat Walk at Sankey Valley Park, Warrington, June 29th, 8.30pm to 10.30pm. Meet Lodge lane car park, Bewsey Bridge, contact 01925 571836 to book a place (£1 per person).
- **National Mammal Week**, July 3rd-10th, details form The Mammal Society at www.mammal.org.uk
- Bat talk and walk at Pickering's Pasture, July 8th, 9.30pm to 11.30pm (contact 0151 425 4706)
- Bat walks at Walton Gardens, Warrington, July 26th and 28th, contact 01925 601617 to book a place (£1 per person)
- Bat walk at Longbarn Park, Warrington, August 3rd, contact 01925 658098 to book a place (£1 per person)
- Bat walk at Norton Priory, August 6th, (contact 01928 569895)
- Mammal trapping at Norton Priory, August 7th, (contact 01928 569895)
- Bat walk and BBQ at Caldly Nature Park, August 13th, 7.45pm (contact 01244 351066)
- Bat walk at Moore Nature Reserve, August 13th, 9.00pm (contact 01925 444689)
- Bat walk at Spike Island, Widnes, August 14th, 8.30pm (contact 0151 420 3707)
- Bat walk at Clinton Wood LNR, Widnes, August 22nd, 9.00pm (contact 0151 257 9849)
- Bat walk and BBQ at Rivacre Valley, Ellesmere Port, August 24th (to book, contact 0151 357 1991)
- Bat walk at Marbury Country Park, August 27th, 8.00pm (contact 01606 77741)
- Mammal walk at Rivacre Valley CP, August 28th, (contact 0151 357 1991)
- Bat walk at Risley Moss, August 29th, contact 01925 824339 to book a place
- Mammal trapping at Norton Priory, October 2nd, (contact 01928 569895)

Contacts;

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Vice-chair; Tony Parker

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