

Wiltshire Mammal Group



Spring 2021

Welcome to the spring 2021 edition of the Wiltshire Mammal Group newsletter. Read on for some highlights of our work in 2020, and some thoughts on the future.

As always, a massive thank you to everyone who supports our work, through surveys, mammal sightings, events and promoting our work.

I was hoping to show that mammal survey and monitoring was very much alive and well in 2020, despite the restrictions of Covid-19! I'm sure you'll agree this was very much the case! I hope you feel inspired to try something new!

For the first time, we're introducing a contents page too – such is the size of this newsletter!

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2020 - What a year!!!???

Looking back on the previous newsletter, its publication at the end of March 2020 coincided with the beginning of the first Covid-19 lockdown. As I write this, the first recipients of the new vaccines are being celebrated on the television news programmes. Clearly, so much has changed in a year. In fact, so much, that it's hard to comprehend quite how we arrived at this point, where so much has changed.

The 2020 field season was certainly dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic and activities were somewhat curtailed in many instances.

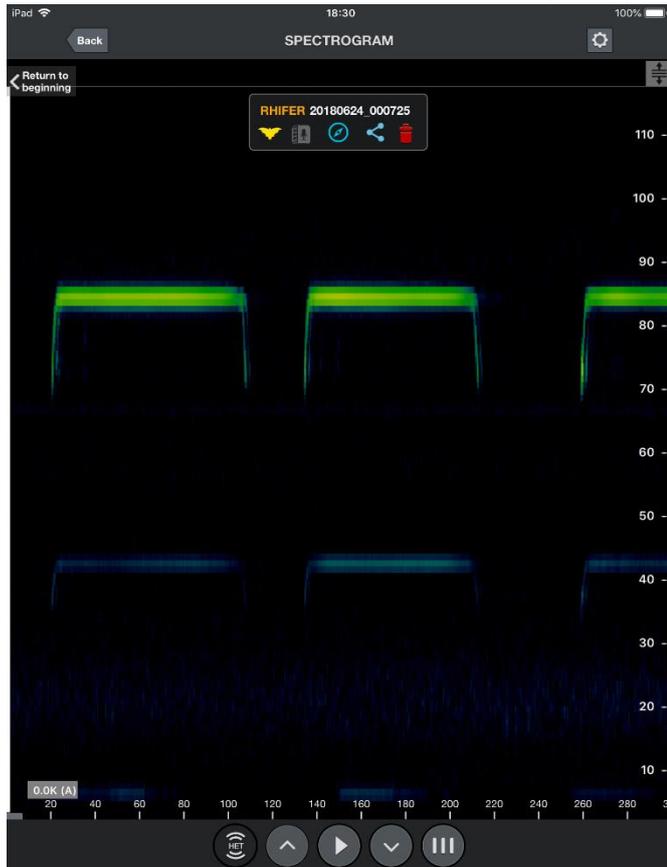


The male "blonde" European hedgehog, in care with Wiltshire Wildlife Hospital, – see page 18 to hear about their Crowdfunding for a new hospital

Many naturalists and citizen scientists delighted in the extra enforced spare time incurred by lockdown measures that provided additional opportunities and time to engage with the natural world. Of course, as mammologists, things weren't

quite so simple for us, as additional restrictions were introduced.

Its perhaps worth a reminder of how things evolved because this determines how we'll move forwards in 2021. Details, and links to the guidance



Sonogram of a greater horseshoe bat, a screenshot from an EchoMeter Touch. Acoustic bat surveys remained an excellent survey tool unaffected by the Covid-19 restrictions. © G Harris.

can be found at the back of the newsletter.

The published guidance from the IUCN Bat Specialist Group, Defra/Natural England et al, highlighted the serious nature of the Covid-19 pandemic (and I think mammologists perhaps understood the risks better than the wider public after the issues were articulated so well in these guidance notes,?). At the time, it was hard not to be massively concerned for the impact upon all mammals (including humans). And, of course, against a backdrop of concern for friends and family, perhaps concerns of wildlife recording are somewhat diminished, especially as the numbers of human cases and deaths rose during the spring.

Lockdown and the following restrictions did, amazingly, have a plus side: the general public developed a sudden, massive, and remarkable interest in the natural world. For how long this will be sustained, is another question, but I think it's fair to say that many wildlife charities did a superb job at rallying at the last minute to engage with and

encourage this interest, including promoting citizen science projects that could be done in gardens or during the short period of permitted outdoor exercise each day. Thankfully we were able to push our following towards a number of these surveys, with organisations such as PTES and Mammal Society.

Lockdown activities appeared to result in a surge of mammal recording from home and I remain hopeful that this can be sustained.

Unfortunately, curtailed activities became the norm in 2020, either because organisations scaled-back or cancelled events, or because the guidance discouraged the handling of mammals (and required the wearing of PPE if surveys were undertaken).

This meant that some members became ever more resourceful in finding ways to continue their studies or engagement with nature, in a way that complied with all of the necessary guidance.

Thankfully, there are plenty of mammal survey techniques that do not rely upon trapping, handling, or upon prolonged periods in close proximity to bat roosts/otter holts/badger setts/burrows/nests etc.

It was heartening, therefore, to see how many mammologists deployed "Covid-friendly" survey techniques such as; camera traps in their garden, dissecting owl pellets to record small mammals, recording tracks and signs, and the deployment of refugia to record small mammals.

My message therefore is simple.

Please follow the guidance in order to protect you, your friends, your family and your wider community. But if lockdown and other restrictions leave you with some spare time, please consider recording the wildlife you encounter.

From hedgehogs in your garden, rats and water voles on your local canal, foxes feeding in the neighbours' bins, hares and rabbits spotted whilst walking your dog – please record them all.

Various organisations such as the Mammal Society and PTES, the BTO, the RSPB, to name but a few, offer participation in various citizen science projects.

Please do consider trying something new – deploy a camera trap in your garden (or somewhere else that you know to be secure!), put down some sheets of roofing felt or corrugated tins to see what small mammals nest beneath them (or reptiles, or

amphibians), deploy some hedgehog footprint tunnels (probably one for next spring!), dissect some owl pellets to discover what they've been eating and share your findings with us on our Facebook page. Enthuse others with your discoveries.

Hopefully the remainder of this newsletter will provide some inspiration!

Let us know what you see through the Wiltshire Mammal Group Facebook Page and Record your sightings with the [Mammal Society's Mammal Mapper app](#) or iRecord or Living Record.

GOH. December 2020.

Wiltshire Mammal Group is YOUR group – get involved!

WMG is largely run by a committee which currently comprises only 2-3 people (including the county recorder and a membership secretary).

Your very small committee achieves a lot – we do the finances, run the membership, keep the social media updated, produce the annual newsletter, assist with events where we can, lead and coordinate surveys where we can, liaise with our partner organisations, responding to enquiries from the public and media and much much more.

A large part of what we do relates to recording and managing data, liaising with the local environmental records centre, and verifying the steady flow of records arriving through Living Record, iRecord, Mammal Mapper app and much more.

We would like to increase the involvement of members in the running of the group. As part of this, we are looking for:

- A Chair person to help drive the group forwards, and inspire new members and develop new projects
- Secretary – to respond to enquiries, help organise meetings, take minutes and communicate with the membership
- Treasurer & membership – to develop the membership system and make further efficiencies.
- Event organisers to help organise guided walks or talks, to book venues, help book speakers etc. it would be great to be able to organise more events, training etc – but the existing small and overwhelmed committee simply doesn't have the resource to do so.

If you have experience of such roles already, please get in touch. But please don't be shy or presume you don't have the skills – we'd love to hear from you.

For further information regarding the group, membership and recording please email wiltshiremammalgroup@hotmail.co.uk.

Committee members;

- Chair (position vacant)
- Secretary (position vacant)
- Lisa Wade (Treasurer & Membership) wmgmembership@gmail.com
- Gareth Harris (County Recorder) wiltshatrecords@gmail.com
- Jessie Forster
- Purgle Linham (Website)

Notes from the County Recorder

Gareth Harris

As already discussed, recording activities were impacted somewhat in 2020 by the restrictions put in place as a result of Covid-19, but records continued to flow.

Hazel dormouse monitoring continued where it was possible and compliant with restrictions, and this resulted in a confirmed new site for dormice near Salisbury. All the more remarkable given it took several years of monitoring with nestboxes and survey tubes to prove them present (the habitat looked too good so the team persevered!).

Monitoring continued at other new sites that were confirmed in 2019 near Pewsey and East Knoyle; additional dormice were recorded in 2020.

Meanwhile, dormouse monitoring continued in the Savernake, at Grovely Wood, Nockatt's Coppice, Collingbourne Woods, Oyster's Coppice, to name but a few. Each is coordinated by its own brilliant monitoring group.

Harvest mouse surveys continued albeit on a smaller scale (see details elsewhere in this newsletter) and we continued to receive a small number of records from across the county. There are still some obvious gaps in their Wiltshire range which we'll aim to address soon. The Mammal Society are fundraising to expand their work on harvest mice – Wiltshire Mammal Group supported their funding applications with letters of support, so fingers crossed for a positive outcome!

In fact, small mammals have been quite the trend in 2020, from Dormice and harvest mice, to small mammals recorded under reptile refugia and on camera traps by the great work of Natural England on Salisbury Plain.

Natural England continued their small mammal studies on Salisbury Plain in 2020, (with regards to the monitoring of prey items for a potential reintroduction of Hen Harrier) and benefitted from the involvement of a number of Wiltshire Mammal Group members. A trapped weasel was the highlight in 2020!

2020 may also have been the year of the mustelid, specifically, otters and polecats. During late summer, a number of live polecats were observed across the county, and indeed were also photographed or videoed. Late summer coincides with the dispersal of juveniles from their mothers.

Otters were frequently observed in 2020 too, and often by members of the public on rivers/canals in towns and cities such as Salisbury, Devizes, Chippenham and Melksham. It would appear that the county's otter population has reached a threshold where daytime observations in more urban areas is increasing commonplace. I think it's fair to say that the crowd of people in Salisbury centre watching a family of otters foraging on



Polecat, near Salisbury, 2020 (C) Rosemary McDonald.
This individual confronted the photographer, hissing.
Note the proximity to her wellington boot!

Saturday 5th December 2020 will never quite forget the experience – some weeks later, people in Salisbury are still talking about otters and looking for them when shopping!!

Sadly, the population has also reached the threshold where more animals are found victim to road traffic accidents, with perhaps as many as 10 noted across the county this year. This at least suggests a healthy and growing population.

Rabbit numbers remained low in 2020 across much of the county, although the spring offered signs of recovery (I saw a field with over 80 rabbits in it in the spring, but by the autumn just a half dozen remained). As rabbit numbers remain low, I wonder what impact this has upon our predators, especially stoat and polecat (but not forgetting red fox and avian predators too) and can only presume times are tough for them too. I would therefore encourage people to keep an eye on their local rabbit populations – conduct regular counts of adults and juveniles on your regular walks and see if they show signs of recovery.

We have mentioned in each of the recent newsletters (2018 and 2019) of the impacts of diseases in brown hares and we circulated information via our website in this regard, encouraging the reporting of dead and dying hares.

Dr Diana Bell, University of East Anglia, who is leading the research on hares, reiterated the need to remain vigilant and to continue reporting instances of dead/dying/diseased hares.

Please record all of the hares you see as well as any diseased individuals you encounter. For further information, and for details of where to report diseased hare, please see <https://wiltshiremammals.wordpress.com/2018/12/18/urgent-disease-in-brown-hares-your-help-needed/>.

2020 bucked the recent trend of a decline in mammal records submitted in Wiltshire. Whilst this may be due to increasing engagement with the natural environment, as widely noted this year in relation to our behaviour in the spring lockdown, it may also reflect an increase in interest in mammal conservation and recording!

Please record the mammals you encounter, whether common or rare, it all adds to our knowledge of our county's mammals. Even common species, such as rabbits and many rodents, are important food sources and indicators of the health of the wider environment.

There are a variety of ways to submit records to us – for those using [Living Record](#), please continue to do so, whilst I know that [iRecord](#) is the preferred route for many of you. Please also consider using the Mammal Society's [Mammal Mapper app](#) and for those generating larger sets of data, contact me if you'd like a copy of our Excel template recording form.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed their records, time and expertise in 2020 – fingers crossed for a much enhanced 2021!

Mammal Mapper app

Gareth Harris

Please consider [downloading the Mammal Society's Mammal Mapper app](#); this will ensure that your records are made available to Wiltshire Mammal Group and our local environmental records centre, whilst also capturing vital information that the Mammal Society can use in the monitoring of national trends.



Watch the Mammal Society's latest Mammal Mapper video, narrated by Mammal Society patron Zeb Soanes; <https://youtu.be/PgBul8YL-X8>

As the Mammal Society's website states "Mammals can be recorded along a route whilst you're walking/running/cycling or even a passenger in a

car, or as one-off sightings, for example a hedgehog in your garden."

The app enables you to easily submit records of field signs as well as sightings of mammals (dead or alive).

And all records submitted are available both to Wiltshire Mammal Group, the local environmental records centres as well as the Mammal Society. The Mammal Society are able to use the records to understand the distribution, abundance and conservation status of British mammals.

The main advantage of Mammal Mapper is "the ability to record where you are looking for animals, or "effort"it provides information about where people are recording and more importantly, where animals are absent. In the past, it has been difficult to understand if gaps in records are caused by a true absence in animals at those locations, or if it is simply an artefact one of nobody recording in those areas. In addition, the inclusion of "effort" provides the ability for researchers to calculate the density of animals. These important biological data are necessary to estimate the total population of a species and understand its conservation status."

Download Mammal Mapper and give it a go.

Lockdown mammal survey

Gareth Harris

There was a sense in 2020 that the Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions meant that it was virtually impossible to do anything but of course it was possible to do somethings. So some of the following articles will hopefully provide some hope or inspiration for others. These surveys were undertaken following all of the necessary guidance, whether to prevent the spread of Covid-19 amongst human populations, or to prevent spread to mammalian populations.

Owl Pellet Dissection

Some bat surveys during the spring lockdown near Corsham, led to the fortuitous discovery of a barn owl roosting site in a beautiful stone barn. No evidence of nesting here but judging by the large volume of pellets of varying ages, it's a favoured roosting site. What a perfect opportunity to collect some pellets, and what a perfect way to entertain oneself during the spring lockdown for Covid-19!! Twenty of the freshest pellets were collected.....



Analysed Owl Pellets, Corsham Estate 2020 © Gareth Harris

Dissection of the twenty pellets, and identification using Yalden (2003), led to the identification of:

- **2 birds of unknown species**
- **19 Wood mice**
- **1 bank vole skull**
- **27 field vole skull**
- **3 pygmy shrew skull**
- **10 common shrew skull**

And most excitingly, a tiny bat skull – it was too damaged to confirm the species, but it was very small, so perhaps likely to be a pipistrelle bat.

These were the first small mammal records for this 1km square – in fact, many parts of Wiltshire lack up-to-date small mammal records, so even moderate efforts in this regard could make a huge contribution.

If you find some pellets, or have the opportunity to analyse some, please share your records.

Small mammal monitoring near East Knoyle

Simon Smart and I were fortunate to be commissioned in 2020 to work on a private site near to East Knoyle, to assist the client with the introduction of wildlife-friendly management practices. Monitoring programmes were launched to establish a baseline for key species, and this



Glow worm beneath reptile (C) G.Harris



The freshly-hatched grass snake (C) G.Harris

included reptile monitoring with regular monitoring of the reptile mats throughout the summer and autumn. This yielded an impressive array of small mammal records and even some glow worms.

Bank voles were regularly recorded and also bred under a number of the mats. Wood mice were occasionally under a couple of mats and then nested in late summer too. Field vole utilised a couple of mat and may have bred too, whilst common shrew often appeared under the mats close to the large ponds.

The mats by the large ponds also produced a delightful freshly-hatched grass snake. Whilst glow worms were also found under several mats across the site.

The regular encounters with small mammals inspired me to deploy a camera trap with close focus lens, adapted to record small mammals up close.

Two locations across the site were used – the margins of the ponds and the edge of a wooded stream. Bank voles were the most frequent visitors to the baited camera box, followed by common shrews and a few wood mice, pygmy shrew and field vole.

With not too much effort, we were able to record a series of small mammals over a period of a few weeks.

Interestingly, this data was also supplemented by dormouse nest box monitoring too. Wood mice and yellow-necked mice were confirmed in a number of the wooden nest boxes and plastic survey tubes, whilst towards the end of the season, fresh dormouse nests were also confirmed.

So it becomes useful to consider what we didn't record, and to ponder if they might be present too? I was hoping to record water shrews by the ponds

or stream; the habitat looks great for them. I am also keeping an eye out for harvest mouse nests – although none have been recorded here so far, they are frequently recorded in Wiltshire. There is also some possibility of finding water vole on the streams– the headwaters here are less likely to support American Mink and certainly the habitat is suitable for them.

Of course, with such an abundance of prey, it seems likely that weasel and stoat may be encountered in due course too!



Common shrew (C) G.Harris



Bank vole (C) G.Harris

Harvest Mice in Wiltshire 2020

Gareth Harris

The Group continued with further harvest mouse surveys in 2020 – searching for nests in the outdoors being something largely possible and compliant with the current government guidance at the time!

In November 2020, the Group supported Anna Forbes and the Action for River Kennett (ARK) Project, with a survey at their reserve; Stonebridge Meadows, in Marlborough. This was initiated after

ARK volunteers found nests and a live harvest mouse during autumn management work - a first site record!

In November, around 20 people from ARK and WMG found 30 nests. (All surveys undertaken in compliance with government guidance for Covid-19).



Harvest mouse, Stonebridge Meadow (C) Andy Blake
ARK Volunteer



Harvest Mouse nest in willowherbs, River Avon, Enford
(C) Gareth Harris

This led to some media interest ([here](#)) and a BBC Radio Wiltshire interview ([here](#), straight after Heaven 17's *Temptation*, at 15:40 on the 11th November 2020!).

WMG also assisted Tisbury & District Natural History Society in October 2020 with an event for their younger members, surveying the survey site near Tisbury beforehand. This event generated a series of new records for a part of the county previously lacking in records.

Autumn 2020 also saw a flurry of records from across the county, such as Avebury, Stanton St Bernard, Enford and Roundway Down Devizes (thank you to Rhodri). These records relate to nests in field margins, along by-ways, reeds in the Kennet & Avon Canal and willowherbs in fen on the edge of the Salisbury Avon. Great to see harvest mice using such a diversity of habitats.

Nests can be easily found in mid-winter across the downs, often along fence lines in long grass – please keep an eye and submit any records.

Harvest mice & owl pellets – with Young Nature Watch

Inés López-Dóriga

Young Nature Watch, a new branch of the Tisbury Natural History Society, was formed this summer to bring people (especially young) closer to nature, so it can be better appreciated and (hopefully)



preserved. Whilst the TNHS has an interesting programme of talks in winter and reserve visits in summer, YNW has a more diverse and complementary programme of activities, mostly of a practical nature. Two of the activities carried out so far have had mammals at their core: a harvest mice nest survey and an owl pellet dissection workshop.

For the harvest mice nest survey, as organisers (who had never seen a real-life nest before!) we identified a suitable field with field margins and were lucky to have the guidance of Gareth Harris and Peter Thompson on how to search and identify the nests of these amazing mammals. Whilst a bit of "added interest" was added to keep children amused on the public survey day (we placed some old nests borrowed from Peter Thompson's display collection), the experience served the double



Nest searching (C)T&D Natural History Society

purpose of verifying the local presence of harvest mice in a previously un-surveyed area (actual nests were found both on the recce and on the public survey day) and promoted the awareness about these incredible mammals among the attendants (which included other farmers that will hopefully look for harvest mice nests on their land). In addition, we now intend to repeat this survey on a

yearly basis on the same field to monitor the levels of harvest mice activity.

Our second mammal activity was an owl pellet dissection workshop. We collected owl pellets from tawny and barn owls from four different locations in our area. After being explained how owl pellets are formed and regurgitated, the attendants dissected them with the help of tweezers and... cocktail sticks! Our identification guides included birds as potential prey but we only found small mammals on our samples. The level of identification undertaken during the workshop was not very detailed: we mostly distinguished rat and mouse without taking it to species level. Our guides also had shrew, vole and mole but none were positively identified. The participants (including little children) were completely enthralled by the excitement of the discovery of small bones in animal "sick". We will now be sending Gareth Harris a selection of our



Owl pellet analyses (C) T&D Natural History Society

grid-referenced pellet samples so he can undertake proper identifications and record them adequately. Knowing that the information is useful, in addition to fun, we will probably undertake more specific identifications and records when we repeat the activity.

For 2021, we have pencilled the following mammal-based activities: a bat walk, a water vole survey and a dormice nut survey. Although we are based in Tisbury, we welcome anybody at our activities as part of YNW – TNHS (note our activities are free for <21 years old but there is a small fee for adults), so please email (youngtnhs@gmail.com) if you would like to make suggestions/help/attend, and visit our online platforms for news (<https://www.tisburynaturalhistory.com/>, <https://www.facebook.com/tisnathist>, <https://www.instagram.com/youngnaturewatchwilts>, <https://twitter.com/youngnaturewat1>).

Small Mammal Trapping Hen Harrier Release Field Parsonage Down NNR

Robyn Owen

Since 2018 we have been small mammal trapping on Salisbury Plain Training Area to: 1. estimate food availability at the time released birds will be independently foraging; 2. monitor long term effects that released birds may have on small mammal populations and 3. identify grassland structures that encourage high numbers of small mammals and ensure effective management of those habitats. Unfortunately due to the COVID-19 pandemic we were unable to carry out small mammal surveys on the Plain this season. However, not all is lost. As part of the hen harrier reintroduction project, in 2019 we created a 25 acre predator proof release field that we managed to survey this year. The purpose of this field is to not only have a safe area for hen harriers to be released but also create a thriving habitat for wildlife and thus an available 'supermarket' for the released birds. We have sown a variety of crops to encourage small birds and pollinators separated by strips of rough grass for small mammals and beetle banks. After only two years the field has flourished and we have observed many species using it to forage and nest.

This autumn we were able to carry out two small mammal trapping surveys within the field. By surveying in two sites we hoped to encompass all of the different crop types/habitats within the field. The two survey sites were almost identical in composition of crops. We caught only a few different species of small mammals in both surveys, but did catch a surprise Weasel in the Southern site survey (Table 1).

We caught many more wood mice than field vole at both survey sites (Table 1), although we have noted a high number of field vole nesting under corrugated sheets that are permanently in the field. The abundance of wood mice was particularly high in the survey at the North of the field (Table 2). This is likely to be due to the proximity to a hedgerow on the Northern boundary of the release field.

Table 1: Total small mammal species and number caught, across all trapping occasions at two survey sites within the hen harrier release field, Parsonage Down NNR

Survey site	Species Caught	Number
Parsonage: Harrier field South	Wood mouse	7

	Field Vole	3
	Weasel	1
Parsonage: Harrier field North	Wood mouse	49
	Field Vole	4



Tawny Owl on Camera trap in harrier release field

Table 2: Total small mammal species and number caught, across all trapping occasions at two survey sites within the hen harrier release field, Parsonage Down NNR

Survey site	Total small mammals caught	Abundance
Parsonage: Harrier field south	10	0.07
Parsonage: Harrier field north	53	0.35

Despite a disrupted survey season we are pleased that we have begun some baseline small mammal surveys within the release field that we can repeat annually. It will be particularly interesting to examine how the small mammal population changes, and hopefully increases, over time alongside the establishment of certain field features such as the rough grass.



Harrier release field November 2020. Flemming Ulf-Hansen

We have noted many birds of prey foraging within the field, including a male over wintering hen harrier indicating we may have boosted the small mammal and passerine populations within the local area which is extremely encouraging. We have been welcoming farmers and land managers to visit the field over the last two years. We hope that this field design can prove a model to encourage land owners to manage their land in a more sustainable way that boosts not only small mammals but many other species.



Male Hen harrier foraging in release field
November 2020. Robyn Owen

We would be keen to talk to anyone interested in the reintroduction project or field design so please contact any one of us for more information.

Simon Lee (Project Manager)
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Flemming Ulf-Hansen (Lead Advisor)
flemming.ulf-hansen@naturalengland.org.uk

Robyn Owen (Field Officer)
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Simon Lester (Field Officer)
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Underhill Wood Nature Reserve – Mammal notes 2020

Jonathan Thomson

The mammal highlight of 2020 was finding Dormice at UWNR again – but this time with an interesting & exciting twist.



Male Dormouse (C) Gareth Harris (naughtily, not wearing gloves as per the guidelines – because it nearly escaped!)

Historically, nests and live animals had been confirmed in mixed scrub on the most western edge of UWNR. This part of the land leads into a broad & deep stream valley, that is almost impenetrable with hazel, bramble, holly, blackthorn and hawthorn. No surprise then that Dormice have been consistently confirmed in this area. Lisa and Gareth retrieved the lively male in the picture from a tube in this location, in May 2020. This is the 3rd year in a row that we have either found nests, or have seen live Dormice, in this very defined location.

Lisa and Gareth came back to UWNR in October and we carried out another careful sweep of the land inspecting the tubes and boxes. This time we found a nest, right on the eastern edge of the land. Huge excitement...as the habitat develops, maybe they are spreading deeper into the land. Of

course, it could be that they were already in this location – undetected.



Dormouse nest (C) Jonathan Thomson

Each winter I *conservation lay* sections of hedge and the results are astonishing. (I only ever lay 20 meters at a time. Bats use hedges and trees as waypoints when navigating, laying too much hedge risks detrimentally altering their night flight-scape).

Within a year or two of conservation laying the hedges grow to become, tall, broad & impenetrably dense. I notice that they produce much more blossom in summer and fruit in late summer, early autumn. The hedge in the picture this year contains hazel nuts, blackberries, slough-berry & rose hips. This habitat is likely to be attractive to a range of species, including Dormice.

I additionally let the ground-level margins grow, so vegetation feathers out from the base of the hedge into the adjoining ride or path. These margins are burgeoning with dense grasses and thistles.

Lastly – last year I wrote about the effectiveness of the barn owl barn over the autumn & winter months. This season it is again in use, on nights when the barn owls are unable to hunt outdoors. I was at UWNR recently on a foul night of high winds and heavy rain - I watched the barn owls leave their box and fly directly into their barn, via the small back door. I assume they stayed there for the night, hunting in dry conditions. Success!

Launch of the Wiltshire Bat Care Network

Caitlin McCann

Bat care networks, often affiliated to the county bat groups, may be found in most counties, set up to deliver care and rehabilitation of bats found grounded, injured or generally in need of care. Bats often require more specialist treatment and so bat care networks often work alongside veterinary practices and local wildlife hospitals. Ed.

(Read to the tune of 'We didn't Start the Fire')

- 1 Rescue drivers, feeding time, bat boxes, primrose oil
- 2 Phone numbers, wing tears, of course it 'was not your cat'
- 3 Flight cages, flexi cages, RCB, rehabilitation
- 4 Bottle lids, picky BLEs, IUCN Guidance
- 5 Pipistrellus, guano, waxy worm, sleepless nights
- 6 Bug grub, 'The Vet and I' and 'The Bat in the Car'
- 7 Metacam or PTS?, ticks, mites, what a mess!
- 8 BCT, vet bills, is that an 'I' shape or a 'Y'!?

Wiltshire Bat Care (WBC) was born from the ashes of my hopes and dreams for 2020. Ok, that's a tad melodramatic, but my penchant for waxing lyrical aside, it had been identified at the last 'in person' Wiltshire Bat Group (WBG) AGM that a formalised bat care network didn't exist in Wiltshire in 2020 and from discussions with our neighbouring counties' care groups, one was welcomed!

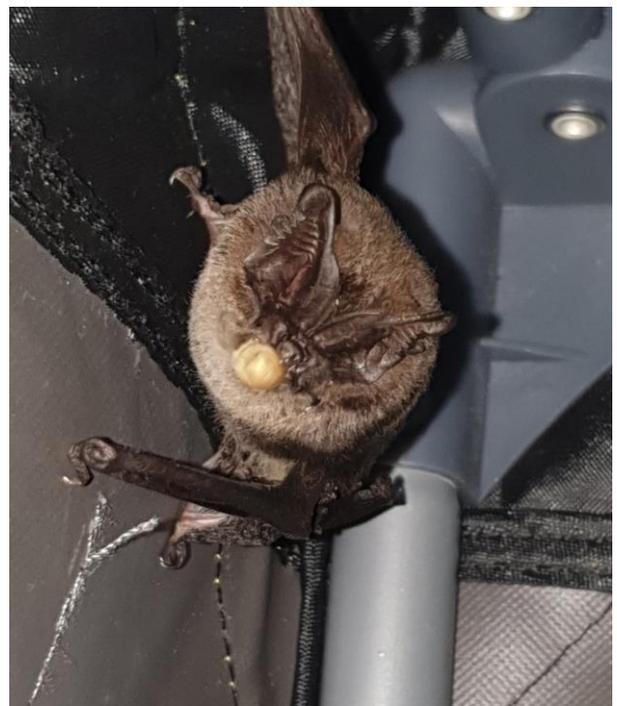
With the help of neighbouring counties' care networks and experienced trainers, the WBG Committee and WBG members, WBC is now being registered as an official county care network for receiving calls from the BCT Helpline, and great relationships have been built with Wiltshire Wildlife Hospital and Oak and Furrows RSCP for receiving bats (as well as countless veterinary surgeries in Wiltshire).

WBC also has use of a flight cage, to help in the rehabilitation of bats, which my partner and myself have built this year. An old aviary kitted out for smaller, more escape prone residents, the flight cage has been used to flight train and soft release 20 juvenile pipistrelles from a farm in Royal Wootton Bassett. I personally have had over 100 bats (8 species) in care this year alone (from 'fresh' pups requiring frequent feeds (successful and unsuccessful reunites with parents), to longer term



Bats using the new flight cage, 2020 (C) C.McCann

rehabbers from cat attacks, to the occasional male who overexerted himself during mating season and just needed a place to crash, a military barbastelle, and soprano pipistrelle that liked to play hide and seek in an MG ZR 😊).



Rehydrated Barbastelle prior to successful release (C) C.McCann

It's been an epic personal journey for me, but an exciting adventure with my fellow bat enthusiasts, and one that aims to, as the COVID situation allows,

more direct communications with our communities about bat care and conservation (e.g. schools, community events etc..) as this is where the true conservation value exists.

If you'd like to join WBC, irrespective of your experience (our goal is to find positions or trainers for those with genuine capacity and interest to help), please contact me at Wiltshirebatcare@gmail.com. WBC's golden rule is 'your time is your own!'. We appreciate any and all voluntary assistance and no one should ever be left feeling obliged. In centralising communications and calls from BCT and other avenues, we hope this can be achieved.

Dormouse monitoring at Stowell Park, nr Pewsey

Simon Smart, Black Sheep Countryside Management

In June 2019 Wiltshire Mammal Group's Kip D'Aucourt and a team of volunteers deployed dormouse survey tubes in a number of woodlands on the Pewsey Downs and in the Pewsey Vale south of West Woods, where there is known established dormouse population. This was to ascertain their use of the wider landscape, its network of hedgerows and small copses, following the discovery of a likely dormouse nest in a bird nesting box within the hedgerow network.

One of the monitoring sites was Stowell Farms, including the woodland associated with the Park.

Excitingly, in October 2019 Kip found an adult dormouse along with small caches of beech mast and sweet chestnut in two other tubes. This was followed by another dormouse found in a tube in August 2020.

These survey results have been extremely useful in informing habitat management on the Estate to ensure that dormouse requirements are taken into account. Most recently, a programme of laurel removal was undertaken in the woodland around the Park. Kip's records ensured that in the areas where dormouse have been recorded, particular care was taken when removing the laurel, avoiding removal of other vegetation, particularly bramble and honeysuckle, and minimising ground disturbance. Work was undertaken in September and October to minimise risk to dormice. Laurel removal will improve the condition of the woodland, particularly as regeneration and any replanting will prioritise native shrubs to provide a

diversity of foraging opportunities for dormouse and other wildlife.



Torpid dormouse (C) G. Harris

The records and presence of dormouse also highlighted the need to re-establish a shrub layer in previously cleared areas of woodland. External to these woodlands, the Estate has applied for an agri-environment grant to help support improvements to the hedgerow network between areas of woodland ensuring that there is a more permeable landscape for dormouse and other woodland species.

To develop a longer-term monitoring programme, tubes will be replaced with boxes in the woodland, whilst the tubes will be moved to surrounding hedgerows to assess the use of the surrounding hedgerow network. The Estate has recently purchased dormouse boxes and tube inserts recognising the importance of volunteer effort that go into monitoring mammals on the Estate.

Continued bat recording in the Chalke Valley

Simon Smart, Black Sheep Countryside Management

Following the success of surveys carried out by Gareth Harris on behalf of the Chalke Valley Farmer Cluster during summer 2019 (see Wiltshire Bat Group newsletter Spring 2020) members of the Cluster were keen to continue to improve their knowledge of the distribution of bats within the Valley. An opportunity to do this arose with a generous grant from The British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) for a static bat detector (a Song Meter Mini Bat) and two hand-held full spectrum bat detectors (two Echo Meter Touch 2 Pros). The difference was made up by a grant from Wiltshire Bat Group and the Cluster themselves.

Throughout the spring and summer, the Echo Meters have been shared around Cluster members who have used them on their farms, often adding another dimension to their summer walks with the dog! The Song Meter Mini has been located throughout the Valley in a range of sites including areas of species-rich chalk grassland, the River Ebbles corridor and areas of woodland including Vernditch Chase and Harewarren. We are continuing to deploy the Song Meter Mini throughout the winter so we can contribute to a winter bat activity survey being run by Lyndon Roberts from Alar Ecology (see [here](#) on Facebook).

The data from April, May and June was very kindly processed by Gareth and Craig Brakes (thank you for their time and expertise). So far 12 species of bat have been recorded including Barbastelle, Lesser horseshoe and Leisler's bat – we have continued to record the high level of Barbastelle activity that we have come to expect in the Chalke Valley (with known or suspected breeding sites in woodlands to the north and south of the Chalke Valley).

Obviously, the purpose of improving our knowledge of bat species presence on farmland is to use this to inform improvements in habitat for those bat species. For example, on one farm near Broad Chalke the farmer is preparing to plant over 1.5km of hedgerow this winter to improve connectivity between the River Ebbles and areas of woodland on the farm.

Additionally, as part of the project funding BASC requested that a guidance note is produced to detail how shoots can manage habitats to encourage bats. Gamekeepers often have a key



Deployment of the SongMeter Mini-Bat (C) Simon Smart. We experimented with putting it on the end of a length of batten to try and minimise leaf rustle in the recording by moving it out of the tree canopy

role in managing habitats such as woodland, hedgerows and rivers so there are real opportunities to positively influence habitat for bats in areas such as the Chalke Valley.

Quidhampton's Hedgehogs

Nick Tomalin

Nick Tomalin, well-known to many of us in his roles with the RSPB, has also been instrumental in establishing the new [Quidhampton Nature Project](#), a community-led project promoting wildlife within the village. One of their project includes a hedgehog project and we're delighted to feature, and promote, their project here. Some great advice here and hopefully this will inspire more projects like this across the county. Ed.

In September I made a plea for any hedgehog records from the village to be sent on to me, in the hopes of finding out how frequently they were seen, and where they were distributed through the village. I've now had more than a dozen records sent in, and these are spread widely through the village. [I've also shared any data WMG has for Quidhampton with Nick too! Ed.]

What was even more useful was that most people reported regular sightings, or behaviour that would suggest a family group. This suggests that there could be a lot of local hedgehog residents! And I'm happy to report that most of these records were live animals, though sadly not all!

The next question is what to do with this information. Perhaps the local hedgehog population is doing well and doesn't need our help. Well, perhaps. But nationally hedgehog numbers have declined significantly, so there's no reason to suspect that we are bucking this trend. In fact, hemmed in as we are by the A36 and railway line, the river, and the Wilton Estate wall, our hedgehogs may actually be slightly restricted in their nocturnal wanderings.

There are a number of simple things we can do to help them. Aside from the simple pleasure from seeing a hedgehog, or from knowing that they are in your garden, there are other benefits, mainly for gardeners. Hedgehogs are predators of garden nasties like slugs and snails, so horticulturalists should be welcoming them in with open arms.

Or open gates. Or through holes in walls. Or under fences: the top tip for helping hedgehogs: give them access. Walls, fences and other boundaries all too often prevent them from getting in or out of otherwise suitable habitat. This can be simply resolved by creating a hedgehog highway – basically a hole through whatever barrier otherwise exists. These holes only need to be about the size of

a CD, but a neighbourhood that is well connected is well used by hedgehogs.

The next tip is to provide a safe space. Clear away anything that could endanger the hogs (netting or litter especially), create a ramp for your pond (hedgehogs can swim but will struggle to get out of ponds with steep sides), stop using chemicals (weedkillers etc), and check any areas of long grass before mowing or strimming. In Autumn it's especially important to check your bonfire before setting light to it, as it may be the perfect location for hibernation and hedgehogs may be busily preparing it for their winter slumber.

Once you have a safe space, encourage the hogs in! Create a wild area or corner if you can, and put



Hedgehog in my bug hotel (C) Nick Tomalin

out food and water where possible. Hedgehogs are lactose intolerant, so don't use milk or bread, but instead opt for meat-based cat or dog food or biscuits, or purchase specially formulated hedgehog food! Finally, create a hedgehog home where they will be safe to breed and/or hibernate. This could be as basic as some sticks and twigs (think bonfire!), or could be a [built or bought](#) wooden house. There are plenty of designs available online if you want to try. Hedgehogs have taken up residence in the base of my bug hotel! It wasn't designed with them in mind, but it provided the perfect conditions, and I have now seen a sleepy hog dragging leaves in to create comfy bedding



Our aged cat appreciated a hole in our gate so he didn't have to climb over it, but it turned out that hedgehogs also climb through it, so I added a step and a welcoming sign! © Nick Tomalin

for winter. Of course, you can try any of these things in your own garden, but wouldn't it be great if [lots of people joined forces to help hedgehogs through the village](#)? What use is a single garden if hedgehogs roam vast distances each night? How helpful is a hedgehog highway if it leads nowhere? It would be lovely to think that some of these steps could be taken in a co-ordinated way, to maximise their impact.

If you would like to get involved in Quidhampton, please join the [Quidhampton Nature Project](#) and get in touch.

Ideally, I would like to recruit a handful of people to act as hedgehog champions in the village, both encouraging hedgehogs in their own gardens and encouraging those around them to do likewise. Please get in touch if you think you could help in any way, and lets do what we can to help our hedgehogs thrive.

Or why not set up your own project in your village? There's a lot of information available online, especially at the PTES' [Hedgehog Street website](#) where you can sign up to become a hedgehog champion!

Mammals in Wiltshire (2nd Edition)

Gareth Harris



Mammals in Wiltshire

Second Edition

Version 1 (3rd March 2017)

Editors: Gareth Harris & Purgle Linham

March 2017

Wiltshire & Swindon Biological Records Centre, Wiltshire Mammal Group & Wiltshire Bat Group



A reminder that the atlas was published in March 2016 and that it remains an up-to-date record of the current known distribution of mammal and bats in Wiltshire. Entitled, **Mammals in Wiltshire, 2nd Edition**, it can be downloaded [here](#), free of charge. [Mammals in Wiltshire 2nd edition ver 1.0](#) Furthermore, work has already begun on the next edition! So, a huge thank you to Wiltshire's active mammal recorders who continue to monitor and survey across the county, generating the data for the next update to the atlas. Since the publication of the atlas in 2016, the county has seen significant progress in our knowledge of species such as; harvest mouse, barbastelle bat and Bechstein's bat. New records of hazel dormouse require further updates to the distribution maps, whilst a new bat species for the county has been confirmed not once, but twice!

Please get involved! Join Wiltshire Mammal Group (or Wiltshire Bat Group), get involved with projects such as dormouse monitoring and hedgehog survey, or simply submit the records of the mammals you see. Help us make a difference.

Badgers

Kate Allberry

As winter sets in, much of our native wildlife is hunkering down. Whilst smaller mammals such as hedgehogs go into hibernation during cold weather, larger species such as badgers continue to forage, albeit to a lesser extent, with a well-developed winter layer from body fat reserves accumulated during autumn to keep them going.

The European badger (*Meles meles*) is the largest predator in the UK, which is protected under numerous wildlife conservation legislation and fully protected under the 1992 Badgers Act. Well-known for its distinct black and white stripy features, rotund behind, and large, complex social systems, it is a big fan of earthworms, which make up 80% of its diet.

As the face of our natural landscape in the UK has gradually changed, so too has the ecology of our wildlife. Top predators which previously helped to maintain a healthy ecosystem such as wolves and lynx, have been eradicated, replaced instead by mid-level predators such as badgers. Badgers therefore play an important role in maintaining the surrounding ecosystem by:

- helping to maintain and regenerate soil health during sett-building, by helping the breakdown and cycling of nutrients
- encouraging important plant populations by dispersing seeds in their dung - areas around setts have greater plant diversity!
- creating habitats for other wildlife including amphibians, invertebrates and pollinators, by creating moisture-rich spoil heaps. Setts also double up as refuge for other species such as foxes, pine martins, voles and wood mice.



Camera trap footage of badgers at their sett (C) K Allberry

Badgers have survived thousands of years of change, making it an incredibly resilient species. However, despite its unique ability to adapt to modern environmental revolution, the current status

of the UK's badger population, and that of Wiltshire, is largely unknown. Badgers have historically suffered relentless persecution and, despite their legal protection, this continues across much of the UK today. Both COVID-19 and lockdown have reportedly led to an increase in persecution and other wildlife crime, whilst the annual badger cull across Wiltshire provides the perfect cover for the illegal activity of others to go undetected.

It is critical now more than ever for people to keep an eye on their local setts, and monitor them regularly for any illegal activity such as sett blocking. Any suspicious or suspected illegal activity should be reported immediately to Wiltshire police or the Wiltshire Rural Crime Team at ruralcrimeteam@wiltshire.pnn.police.uk. You can also get in touch with the Wiltshire Badger Group at info@wiltshirebadgergroup.org.uk, who can provide information and advice on monitoring your local setts.

I would like to end by recommending an extraordinary badger book called '*Badger Behaviour, Conservation and Rehabilitation*' by George Pearce - an experienced farmer-turned-badger expert. Through his writing, he brings badgers and their behaviours to life in this wonderfully written and very accessible text, shedding light on one of our most ancient native mammals.

Wiltshire Wildlife Hospital – Crowdfunding

Mike and Marilyn Korkis run the Wiltshire Wildlife Hospital, founded 27 years ago, in Newton Tony, South Wiltshire. With their team of carers, volunteers and ambulance drivers, they have dedicated their lives to helping wildlife in need for many years.

They do astonishing work, greatly supporting the county's wildlife – but did you know they also contribute to our knowledge of mammals across the county? Data from Marilyn and her team, for species such as hedgehog, brown hare, otter and polecat, feeds into our atlas project.

But now, Marilyn and the team need our help too. They and their charity are totally reliant upon volunteer support and public donations to keep running. As is evident when you see the wide range of animal patients in their care; "*Our wildlife is in trouble and we are on the frontline of that crisis, picking up the pieces and giving these creatures a second chance*", says Marilyn.

"Our current building is struggling to cope with the number of animals that we now have to deal with. It is cramped, tired, hard to keep warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Everything is old and worn out from years of constant use. We simply haven't had the time or the resources to keep updating the facilities, while we are caring for all the animals. And while we have an incredible network of volunteers, we cannot have more than a few people here working at any one time, there just isn't the room. In spite of all this we ensure that we give every animal the care it needs, but we know we can do it better if we can just improve our facilities.

"This fundraising is critical for the long term future of the hospital. We cannot stop what we are doing, too many animals depend on us. We want to be able to offer a service that our wildlife deserves and create a legacy for future generations."

Amazingly, Dame Judi Dench is supporting their fundraising efforts, and as I write this, in excess of £25,000 has been pledged.

Further details of their Crowdfunding efforts may be found here; [Help us to Build a New Hospital - a Environment crowdfunding project in Newton Toney by Wiltshire Wildlife Hospital \(crowdfunder.co.uk\)](https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/help-us-to-build-a-new-hospital-a-environment-crowdfunding-project-in-newton-toney-by-wiltshire-wildlife-hospital). Please please please consider supporting these efforts.

GH.

Operation Artemis

PC Marc Jackson, Wiltshire Police Rural Crime Team

Hare coursing and poaching offences are just as prevalent as they were 50 years ago, however, the image of the wily poacher taking one for the pot is long gone and has instead been replaced by proficient groups who roam the countryside to engage in a more anti-social type of poaching, which often involves criminal damage, threats and illegal betting.

Wiltshire has historically attracted such groups who are enticed by the hare population, the chalk grass lands and arable fields, which are perfect for this crime type.

In response to a steady increase in reports around hare coursing, Wiltshire Police launched Operation Artemis around three years ago. The Operation formed part of a national operation aimed at preventing and disrupting the hare coursing groups across the UK. This was launched in Lincolnshire as Operation Galileo and was taken up by 12 forces

nationally. This has now expanded to 22 forces in 2020.

Wiltshire sees on average around 450 reports per year for hare coursing and poaching, though it is



believed to be higher due to under reporting by the public. Information suggests groups from Surrey, Hampshire, Dorset, Berkshire, Avon & Somerset and

Wales target Wiltshire for the purposes of poaching and hare coursing.

Operation Artemis was launched by the rural crime team in Wiltshire and in partnership with the National Farmers Union, National Gamekeepers Organisation and BASC. All these partners sit on the Rural Crime Partnership for Wiltshire.

One of the aims of Op Artemis is to raise awareness to the general public around hare coursing and poaching, and the impact it has on the rural communities across Wiltshire.

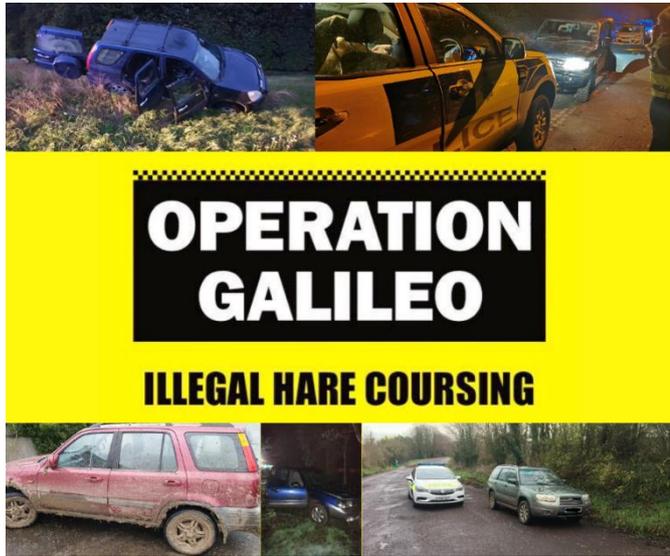
Hare coursing was made illegal in 2005 by the Hunting act, although a hardcore element continued with the pastime and over the years younger individuals have become involved and it is often recognised as a gateway crime into all rural crime types. As those involved in hare coursing or poaching are often involved in thefts, burglaries, drugs and violence. Essentially this is organised crime in the countryside.

Individuals will often use poaching as a cover to identify farms, houses and agricultural items to target at later dates. Whilst out poaching they are learning the byways and well less trodden routes to enable them to move around in the countryside unseen and undetected.

Those involved will often meet with others from different counties and use the activity to cement working relationships, swap information and bet illegally on hare coursing activity. The "days out" are often set up on social media or on closed messaging systems, which are difficult for the authorities to monitor. One known site linked to hare coursing has over 2k follows across the UK.

Several incidents within Wiltshire have led to damage to farmland and property totalling over £5000. We have also seen reports of threats and violence towards individuals when they have tried

to prevent the groups or challenged them. We



have also seen information suggesting illegal betting has taken place with prize pots worth several thousand pounds involved. This is no longer about one for the pot or the image of traditional poaching.

Wiltshire Police relies on information from the public and those who are affected by the poaching groups. Op Artemis encourages the public to report sightings of vehicles or persons in remote locations who could be engaging in wildlife type offences.

Often 4x4s with several individuals and lurcher type dogs will be noticed driving through crops, passing along byways or stopping at local petrol stations. You may even know someone who discusses their activities or highlights them on social media. Often this information is helpful to us in identifying locations and routes used, as well as the vehicles and individuals involved.

Over the last three years the rural crime team and community policing teams across the county have arrested and charged over 50 individuals involved in poaching type offences. Numerous vehicles have been seized for offences such as no tax or insurance or under the Hunting Act. Over 20 dogs have been seized as part of investigations.

The rural crime team is committed to combatting any form of wildlife crime, and we work closely with our colleagues from the MOD Police to address

issues on Salisbury Plain. We also liaise with our neighbouring forces to ensure information is shared and work together on cross border operations.

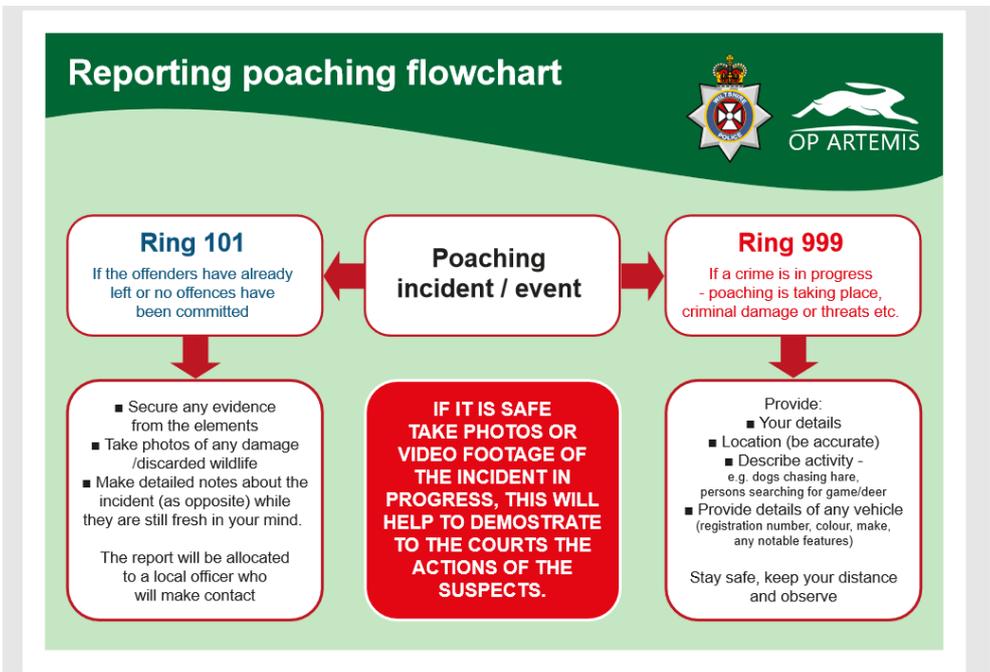
Work with local Farm Watch members around preventative measures such as bunding, ditching, reducing access points have seen some positive impacts for hare populations with notable increase around the Marlborough Downs area.

We are also hoping that statistical data from the Wiltshire Mammal Group for the hare population across Wiltshire married with crime reports will help us to improve targeted patrols in areas where the hare population is high to help reduce the population being targeted.

We don't advise the public to confront individuals involved in wildlife crime but instead to pass information via 101 or through Rural Crimestoppers 0800 783 0137.

If hare coursing or poaching is witnessed in progress, then 999 can be used as it is a crime in progress. Often other offences are occurring such as damage to crops, gates and fences, along with Traffic Act related offences.

WMG is pleased to be working with PC Marc Jackson, ensuring that our data is used to target resources helping to fight wildlife crime in Wiltshire. Ed.



AOB:

Plea for Licenced Dormouse Workers

Gareth Harris

There are nearly 25 dormouse sites being monitored by volunteers across the county, ranging from projects coordinated by Wiltshire Mammal Group, Wildlife Trust volunteer groups and the National Trust.

We are looking for additional people to help with survey and monitoring projects coordinated by Wiltshire Mammal Group, and specifically, for licensed dormouse workers willing and able to commit to longer-term monitoring. At the moment, we lack experienced licensed people and have a number of sites where landowners/managers are willing to host projects, if we have sufficient people able to manage these projects.

If you live in Wiltshire (i.e. wouldn't need to travel a long way) and are licensed and would be interested in coordinating surveys of a site, please get in touch.

Trainees, who are working towards their licence, are very welcome to get involved in survey events too (we're not trying to exclude you!) but at the moment, the numbers of projects and surveys are limited by the number of available licenced dormouse workers, rather than willing volunteers and helpers.

If you'd like more information, contact me on wiltsbatrecords@gmail.com.

Thanks - Gareth Harris

Partners & funders

Wiltshire Mammal Group enjoys the support of a number of organisations across the county. All are warmly thanked.

Forestry England, supporting projects in The Savernake, Collingbourne Wood, West Wood, the Braydon Forest, Grovely Wood and the Harewarren, continue to be mega supportive. Our thanks to Tom Blythe, Andy Harris and Colin Elford.

Simon Smart Black Sheep Consulting, who have supported the harvest mouse surveys since 2017 and so much more!

Tisbury & District Natural History Society, in particular, Peter Shallcross and Inés López-Dóriga

Jonathan Thomson (Underhill Wood) for supporting ongoing studies of small mammals and bats (and much much more!)

Longleat Centerparcs for supporting the ongoing dormouse studies

Natural England's Hen Harrier Project Team, especially Robyn Owen for involving mammal group members and sharing mammal trapping data each year.

Our thanks also to a considerable number of private landowners across Wiltshire who host various surveys and monitoring projects and who routinely provide access and a warm welcome.

Upcoming events

In light of recent events relating to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is impossible to plan any events too far in advance at the moment, and indeed most events have been subject to cancellation or postponement already. Any events that can go ahead may be subject to restrictions in line with government advice to minimise potential transmission of the virus.

However, the first, of hopefully a series, of online events is planned for **Thursday 4th March 2021; The life and times of the Brown Hare in Wiltshire - with Peter Thompson**. Tickets can be [purchased via Eventbrite, follow this link](#).



Brown hare (C) Pete Thompson

Covid-19 – the evolution of guidance where it relates to mammalogists

The Covid-19 restrictions from the UK government limited many activities, initially during the lockdown in the spring, and then following this, as guidance restricted (to varying degrees) gatherings of people for "non-essential" purposes.

As mammalogists, we were subject to additional guidelines and restrictions that limited our interactions with mammals to prevent infection of wild mammal populations. This guidance was published by Defra / Natural England and was relevant for all people surveying and monitoring mammals (including consultant ecologists working on development projects, as well as volunteer surveyors). This was published 28th May 2020 and may be found [here](#). This guidance was based upon a confirmed risk of infection of wild mammal populations – note that this guidance was about protecting wild mammals, unlike the original government guidance which related to protecting human populations.

A number of organisations followed this with species-specific updates, for example:

PTES provided similar guidance with regards to surveying for and handling dormice, as part of monitoring work; see [here](#). This was based upon a disease risk assessment completed by ZSL which be downloaded [here](#).

Advice was issued by the [IUCN SSC Bat Specialist Group](#) on the 13th April 2020 and then updated on the 19th June 2020. This recommended an almost complete suspension of field activities for the protection of bats stating; *"Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from humans to animals has been documented. If human-bat transmission is possible, the impact on bat populations and conservation will depend on the consequences of SARS-CoV-2 for bat health and the potential for bat-to-bat transmission. The worst-case scenario considers SARS-CoV-2 circulating in bat populations with the potential to spillover to other wildlife and people. Studies to determine whether humans can spread SARS-CoV-2 to bats, bat morbidity, and transmission are ongoing. Until we have a clearer picture of the magnitude of these risks, the IUCN Bat Specialist Group recommends suspending all field work that involves direct interactions with bats. This includes capture and handling bats, as well as being in sustained proximity (< 3 m) at roost sites."*

IUCN BSG updated this further in June to; *"it is the opinion of the panel that there is a credible risk of human-to-bat transmission of SARSCoV-2, but this risk can be reduced using appropriate mitigation strategies"*, with a link to an [advisory document](#).

Bat Conservation Trust's response to this, on the 16th April 2020 [may be viewed here](#), and they updated this on the 2nd June with Natural England's [guidance from Defra](#).

BCT's response reiterates the IUCN advice, adding, *"...in relation to animal health, advice given to BCT from Defra is that if bat work is essential (in line with Government guidance) and cannot be postponed it can continue if good disease risk management practices, including appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE), and social distancing are implemented. All other work should be postponed."*

The Defra guidance of the 2nd June remains the current advice to follow.

Thanks All for now, Happy New Year and safe recording in 2021!