

Northumbria Mammal Group Newsletter

Newsletter – Spring 2017
Compiled by Jonathan Pounder



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For updates on the mammal groups activities please check out: www.northumbriamammalgroup.org.uk.

- **Facebook** <https://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/groups/219105621438347/>

Articles for the Newsletters

If you have any article, events, pictures, interesting walk or talk; or a sighting you wish to share then send the details across. The dates for receiving information are (flexible and may change depending on events).

Annual General Meeting

The Northumbria Mammal Groups AGM will be held at 7pm on Thursday 11th May 2017 and Rainton Meadows, Durham. All members welcome

Equipment available to borrow

Over the years the Northumbria Mammal Group has been able to purchase equipment to use for mammal surveys, events, etc. This equipment is available to loan to Mammal Group members for mammal related activities. It is now being stored at the offices of the Natural History Society of Northumbria in the Great North Museum: Hancock in central Newcastle. Below is a list of some of the items that we have. If you would like to borrow any of these please contact the Natural History Society to arrange this: nhsn@ncl.ac.uk or 0191 208 2790.

GPS	Ordnance Survey Maps	Longworth traps
Pesola spring scale	Trail cameras	Bat detector
Binoculars	Night 'scope	Head torches
CB radios	Mammal ID sheets	Lots of mammal books

Events

Saturday 27th May

Durham Wildlife Trust

Otter Walk in the Derwent Valley

As part of the Land of Oak and Iron project join us for a walk along the River Derwent to look for signs of otters and to learn about their ecology. The event will take place between 10:00 – 13:00 starting from the Thornley Woodland Centre. Prior booking essential, see Durham Wildlife Trust website for more details <http://durhamwt.com/>

Friday 23rd & Saturday 24th June

Durham Wildlife Trust

Small Mammal Residential Course

Details TBC, please see Durham Wildlife Trust website for more details

Saturday 5th & Sunday 6th August

ERIC NE

Big Watch Weekend

We have the Big Watch Weekend on the 5th & 6th August 2017. This will involve surveying along the coast for Cetaceans. ID training sessions will be provided in July too. Anyone wanting to take part can contact paul.stevens@twmuseums.org.uk

Mink recording

Durham Wildlife Trust are looking to carry out a project from source to sink total eradication of mink on the Tees, Tyne and Wear. Any records of Mink in Durham and the wider North East will be gratefully received.

Bringing the water vole back to Kielder

Water voles were once a common sight on our local waterways but sadly numbers have declined dramatically in recent years. However, thanks to funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the support of partners in Forestry Commission England and Tyne Rivers Trust, NWT is currently

involved in a project to restore water vole populations into the Kielder catchment of the north Tyne, with a view to their eventual spread throughout the catchment and surrounding areas.



What we are doing?

Between 2016 and 2021, this project will reintroduce and establish a source population of water voles which could then expand into the wider mink monitoring area. To achieve this, water voles will be collected from donor sites in the North Pennines, Yorkshire and Trossachs where suitable water vole populations currently exist. Through captive breeding, numbers will increase to ensure sufficient voles are available for reintroduction. Donor animals will be collected in the autumn of 2016, breeding will take place from spring 2017 with an aim for the first release to take place in summer/autumn 2017 and then further annual releases through the life of the project.

Throughout the past two years, NWT volunteers and other partners have been undertaking the task of monitoring for the presence of mink in and around the Kielder Water Forest Park. This has shown that the area is virtually mink free and the environment is suitable for the reintroduction of water voles. We cannot however rest on our laurels as mink are always on the fringes of the area and could surface at any time, and as such, monitoring will continue as we reintroduce water voles to Kielder.

We are producing videos to document the process of capturing, breeding and release of voles into Kielder. Here is the first of the videos on the capture process. The rest will follow during spring/summer 2017.

See more at: <http://www.nwt.org.uk/RestoringRatty>

News

'Extinct' Mountain Dogs Rediscovered in the Wild

Unseen for more than 50 years, the New Guinea highland wild dog has at last been confirmed in its natural island habitat.

Scientists are crooning over new pictures that confirm the survival of the New Guinea highland wild dog, which until now was feared to be extinct in its natural habitat on the South Pacific island. Thought to be among the rarest species of canine, the highland wild dogs are either the same as or close relatives of the famous singing dogs of New Guinea, which exist only in captivity.

More than a hundred camera-trap pictures taken in 2016 show at least 15 wild individuals, including males, females, and pups. Though they are most commonly a golden colour, some of the dogs are cream, ginger, roan, or black, with different markings and patterning's.

http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/03/new-guinea-dogs-found-extinct-pictures-animals/?utm_source=Facebook&utm_medium=Social&utm_campaign=NEWS&utm_content=link_fbwd20170401NEWSnewguineadogsfoundextinctpicturesanimals&sf67100774=1

How many of Britain's wild mammals have you seen? - People's Trust for Endangered Species

Volunteers called to help PTES' ongoing conservation efforts! People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) is calling for an army of volunteers to record any sightings of wild mammals they see in their gardens or local green spaces, as part of its annual Living with Mammals survey.

Now in its 15th year, PTES' Living with Mammals survey relies on members of the public volunteering their time for a few weeks between Monday 3 April and the end of June.

Volunteers are required to choose a site close to their home or place of work, and to spend a short time each week looking out for wild mammals or the signs they leave behind. Volunteers can record their sightings online or via paper forms.

David Wembridge, Surveys Officer at PTES, explains: "Living with Mammals provides a nationwide picture of how wildlife is faring in our towns and cities. Recording wildlife and tracking how numbers are changing is key to ongoing efforts to conserve it."

Last year, grey squirrels were recorded at seven out of every ten sites (69.4%), making them the most commonly reported wild mammal in the survey.

Grey squirrel fertility control funding "top priority" says RFS – Royal Forestry Society

An oral contraceptive for grey squirrels could be the only chance future generations of people will have to enjoy the benefits of fully mature English oaks and other broadleaved trees in our UK towns and countryside, says the Royal Forestry Society (RFS).

The education charity warns that current populations of grey squirrel are reaching proportions which threaten the survival of some of our most loved species of trees. While the new contraceptive offers a very real opportunity to reverse the tide of damage, it needs the government and forestry sector to get behind a long term commitment to fund the five-year research programme required.

RFS Chief Executive Simon Lloyd explains grey squirrels represent the greatest threat to the health of broadleaved trees but currently, woodland owners can only trap and shoot the pest, methods which are not always wholly effective. "Without more effective controls, grey squirrels will continue to strip bark of many broadleaves, including the iconic English oak, when they are young," he says. "This exposes trees to stress and disease, causes irretrievable damage and can kill them. The cost of damage by grey squirrels to trees is conservatively estimated at £14 million a year.

News that research into a grey squirrel oral contraceptive by the government's Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) in York has received an initial £39,000 investment from Defra, is therefore welcome, says Mr Lloyd.

There are an estimated 3.5million grey squirrels in the UK. Scientists estimate around £1m will be needed to carry out a five year oral contraceptive test programme and believe the oral contraceptive would cause populations to fall by around 90% over a few years. As a concept, it has received the backing of Prince of Wales.

North Yorkshire Police launches initiative to close legal loopholes against dog attacks on livestock -

National Rural Crime Network

With the lambing season underway, North Yorkshire Police is joining up with four other rural Forces to take part in a new initiative that could lead to a tightening up of the law against dog attacks on livestock.

Since September 2013 there have been 325 reported dog attacks on livestock in North Yorkshire, and it's a similar picture in some other rural areas*. Injury to livestock can cost farmers and livestock owners thousands of pounds, but police and countryside campaigners are concerned that there may be gaps in the current laws that make it more difficult to deal with the issue effectively.

This week (21 March 2017) North Yorkshire Police has joined up with four other Forces, Sheepwatch UK and the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England to launch a special initiative aimed at gathering more information about dog attacks on livestock, and the power of the police to deal with them. The Forces will look at how livestock attacks are reported, recorded and handled, to assess whether the law needs to be changed or updated.

Chief Constable Dave Jones of North Yorkshire Police, who is the national policing lead for rural and wildlife crime, explains: "Our experience of dealing with dog attacks suggests that there are some areas of the current legislation that could be improved. For example, the definition of livestock doesn't cover all the types of animals that we know can be affected. In some cases, the police can't legally seize a dog that has been involved in an attack, which makes it difficult to prevent the same thing happening again.

And whilst livestock damage can be extremely costly for the animals' owner, the maximum fine under law is relatively low and can be disproportionate to the loss. We believe that there may be scope for the law to be tightened up, but we need hard evidence to confirm it. Through the initiative we have launched this week, five rural Forces will start to gather more details about dog attacks on livestock so that, if the evidence supports it, we can present a clear case to support a change in the law."

UK first as rare black dormouse is found – Blackdown Hills Natural Futures

We are very excited to have discovered a rare black dormouse right here in the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is the only black dormouse ever recorded in the UK! Britain has only one native species of dormouse, the hazel dormouse. Our discovery is a hazel dormouse, but instead of having the normal golden-brown fur this individual is black.

How fitting that this black-furred little fella is living in the Blackdown Hills! image: Blackdown Hills Natural Futures The discovery was made when staff, trainees and volunteers from the Blackdown Hills Natural Futures project were checking dormouse nest-boxes as part of The National Dormouse Monitoring Programme.

This year, the project provided 300 nest boxes and has involved more than 60 volunteers in installing and regularly checking the boxes. First recorded in 1972, and not seen again until last year, black dormice have only ever been recorded in small numbers in northern Germany. So this is a first for the UK.

Red squirrels in the British Isles are infected with leprosy bacteria - École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne EPFL

Microbiologists at EPFL and the University of Edinburgh have discovered that red squirrels in Britain and Ireland carry the two bacterial species that cause leprosy in humans.

Once rampant in medieval Europe, leprosy dramatically declined by the end of the Middle Ages for reasons that are still unclear. About a century ago, leprosy in Europe virtually disappeared, at least among humans. Examining diseased red squirrels from England, Ireland, and Scotland, scientists at EPFL and the University

of Edinburgh have now discovered that the same bacteria that cause leprosy in humans also infect red squirrels. The work is published in Science. Leprosy also affects animals, such as armadillos, which have reportedly caused a few cases of animal-to-human (or “zoonotic”) infections. Drawing from this evidence, the labs of Stewart Cole at EPFL and Anna Meredith at the University of Edinburgh carried out DNA tests on 110 red squirrels from England, Scotland, and Ireland.

Some of these animals showed clinical symptoms of leprosy, while others did not; nonetheless, most were found to be infected with leprosy bacteria. Surprisingly, red squirrels from Brownsea Island, off the south coast of England, were infected with a strain of *M. leprae* that is closely related to one found in a skeleton of a leprosy victim that was buried in Winchester 730 years ago, just 70 km from Brownsea Island. On the other hand, red squirrels from Scotland and Ireland and the Isle of Wight (South England) were found to be infected with the other leprosy bacterium, *M. lepromatosis*. This species causes leprosy in humans in Mexico, and further analysis showed that the two strains from Mexico and Europe diverged from a common ancestor around 27,000 years ago.

“It was completely unexpected to see that centuries after its elimination from humans in the UK *M. leprae* causes disease in red squirrels,” says Stewart Cole. “This has never been observed before.” Access the paper: Charlotte Avanzi, et al. Red squirrels in the British Isles are infected with leprosy bacilli. *Science* 11 November 2016. DOI: 10.1126/science.aah3783

Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group secures HLF investment – Heritage Lottery Fund

Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group has received a confirmed grant of £545,300 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the Fixing and Linking Our Wetlands (FLOW) project, it was announced yesterday (10/11).

The project will be working to improve and enhance wetland habitat on the Manhood Peninsula over the next four years. The wetland network of the Manhood Peninsula is currently a stronghold for the UK’s endangered water vole population. Chichester and Pagham harbours, which flank the Manhood Peninsula, have international significance as wetland habitats because of the wildlife they support. With the help of trained volunteers, the project will carry out essential survey work of the existing wetland network and digitise the findings to make them accessible for a wide range of audiences. Where environmental or flood issues are identified, solutions will be sought and physical work carried out where appropriate and possible. Focus will be on building strong relationships between stakeholders to support a cohesive approach to wetland management across the Manhood Peninsula.

Chloë Goddard, from the Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group, said: “We’re delighted that HLF has given us this grant. The extensive drainage network on the Manhood Peninsula is important to both people and wildlife and this project will work to bring communities together to help us to understand and care for this environment.” Return of the reds – reintroduction hope for iconic species – Trees for Life Photo © Peter Cairns/www.scotlandbigpicture.com An innovative project to boost the number of the UK’s red squirrels by relocating individuals to woodlands they cannot reach by themselves is taking a major step forward this month. Conservation experts at the charity Trees for Life will carefully relocate red squirrels from Inverness-shire and Moray to forests near Kinlochewe and at Plockton, where the species is currently absent despite there being suitable habitat for squirrels. The Red Squirrel Reintroduction Project aims to establish 10 new populations in the northwest Highlands, significantly increasing both the numbers and range of the red squirrel in the UK. “We are giving red squirrels a helping hand to return to some of their long-lost forest homes.

Many Highland woodlands offer the species excellent habitat far from disease-carrying grey squirrels – but because reds travel between trees and avoid crossing large areas of open ground, they can’t return to

isolated woodlands without our help,” said Becky Priestley, Trees for Life’s Wildlife Officer. The next two releases follow a successful first reintroduction in March this year, when the charity relocated 33 red squirrels from Forres and Strathspey to native woods at Shieldaig in Wester Ross. This new population has also bred during the summer, with several young squirrels observed – confirming that the area is excellent habitat with a good natural food supply. There have also been regular sightings reported by local people, with the squirrels ranging widely as they explore nearby habitat. Trees for Life is continuing to monitor the population, with surveys planned for later this year.

Vaccinating badgers against TB does not change their behavior – Zoological Society of London

A ZSL led study dispels claims that badger vaccines could encourage spread of TB. Fears that vaccinating badgers against bovine tuberculosis (TB) could actually increase transmission rates of this devastating cattle disease have been diminished by a study showing no discernible behavioral impacts from this treatment and offering hope of a practical alternative to the UK Government’s controversial cull policy.

The research, led by ZSL’s Professor Rosie Woodroffe and published in the *Journal of Applied Ecology*, examined the behavior of 54 GPS-collared badgers across four separate study sites in Cornwall. Scientists found that of these animals, the 15 that had received the TB vaccine at least once during the course of the project showed ranging behavior that was indistinguishable from those that were unvaccinated.

Confining badgers overnight in humane traps to enable vaccination was also found to have no impact on their behavior. These findings show how the effects of vaccination differ from those of culling, which can encourage the spread of bovine TB by disrupting established social groups and encouraging wider movement of infected animals across the countryside. Lead author Professor Woodroffe said: “The results of this study indicate that badgers’ ranging behavior is not impacted by TB vaccination, and therefore vaccination cannot encourage the spread of disease by causing the wider ranging of infected individuals. Our findings challenge recent claims that vaccinating badgers changes their behavior and so spreads TB to cattle. Those claims were not based on scientific evidence, but on speculation by a handful of individuals. Now that we have been able to test their ideas with scientific data, I hope that farmers and vets will be reassured that badger vaccination is not harmful. Farmers and land managers battling bovine TB on the front line deserve an effective solution to the terrible problems this disease causes – one that’s based on hard scientific evidence rather than speculation.

Compared with the Government’s current culling policy, badger vaccination is less risky, more humane, and cheaper. Hopefully our findings will therefore open the door for greater exploration of badger vaccination as a tool to control TB in cattle.” Read the paper (open access) Woodroffe, R., Donnelly, C. A., Ham, C., Jackson, S. Y. B., Moyes, K., Chapman, K., Stratton, N. G. and Cartwright, S. J. (2016), Ranging behaviour of badgers *Meles meles* vaccinated with *Bacillus Calmette Guerin*. *J Appl Ecol*. doi:10.1111/1365-2664.12837

Information and surveys:

- The Big Bat Map - Bats can be seen in cities, woodland, parks, fields and gardens all over the UK. Help us record where when you see bats as well as find out where others are seeing these wonderful flying mammals - join the bigbatmap family today. <http://www.bigbatmap.org>
- Mammals in the UK are surprisingly under recorded. Help the Mammal Society help mammals by recording mammals or their field signs from home using the Mammal Tracker App. <http://c-js.co.uk/2fhM4xl>
- National Water Vole Monitoring Programme - Our fastest declining mammal needs your help. For the first time we are carrying out an ongoing national monitoring programme that will guide the way for urgent action. Can you survey a site for water voles? <http://c-js.co.uk/2f8Qfj3>

- Have you seen a hedgehog? Worcestershire Wildlife Trust needs your help to find out how Worcestershire's hedgehogs are doing. Please report sightings online <http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/hedgehogs>
- Report a stoat sighting to SNH - Stoats are thought to have first arrived in Orkney in 2010 and reported sightings give us an insight into their distribution across the islands, including the location of population 'hotspots'. If you have seen a stoat in Orkney, either dead or alive, we would really like to hear from you. <http://c-js.co.uk/2eZ4HpM>
- Red squirrel sightings play an important part in our conservation work to protect endangered red squirrels in South East Cumbria. Please report any red squirrels you see to us on our website which outlines the further help needed to save our reds, and also shows annual maps of local red squirrel range. <http://westmorlandredsquirrels.org.uk/sightings/>
- Hedgehog Survey - The Wildlife Information Centre's Hedgehog survey aims to gather up-to-date information on the distribution of hedgehogs in our region. If you see a hedgehog in the Lothians, Borders, Falkirk, Stirling or Clackmannanshire Council areas or the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park please let us know. <http://c-js.co.uk/2f8RPS4>
- Mammal Web - Help monitor mammals in North East England. Register as a Spotter and help classify thousands of trail camera images online or become a Trapper and upload images from your own camera. Mammal Web is run by Durham Wildlife Trust in collaboration with Durham University. vkent@durhamwt.co.uk www.mammalweb.org
- Take part in Essex Wildlife Trust's Hedgehog Survey - During the summer months hedgehogs can travel up to 2 kilometres in search of food, so they need access to plenty of gardens to sustain themselves and their young. Help us to monitor the distribution of hedgehogs in Essex by reporting sightings of hedgehogs in your garden, or in your local area. <http://c-js.co.uk/2f8Oouz>
- Mammal Tracker app - Mammals in the British Isles are surprisingly under-recorded. Whether it is a direct sighting of a mammal or one of their many field signs that you have spotted, anyone can submit a record through the app which features 39 species. <http://c-js.co.uk/2f8QjiS>
- American Mink in Wales - The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales, in partnership with Natural Resources Wales, is collating information on the location of invasive American Mink in Wales. If you have seen a mink and would like to help, you can let us know the location and date that you saw it: 01656 724100 or email. l.baggett@welshwildlife.org
- National Bat Monitoring Programme - Volunteers are needed to help the Bat Conservation Trust track changes in the UK's bat populations as part of the National Bat Monitoring Programme. Surveys are geared to different levels of experience, from complete beginners to experienced bat workers. <http://c-js.co.uk/2eK1kTj>
- DeerAware - Road traffic accidents involving deer present a major problem in the UK as well as in many other countries in Europe. This web site exists to offer basic advice on how to avoid a collision and to collect data on the number of accidents. www.deeraware.com

Group Contacts

Want to get more involved with the mammal groups, please contact:

Newsletter: Jonathan Pounder, 88 Durham Street, Hartlepool, TS24 0HE Tel: (07980 581 437

Email: jonathan_pounder@hotmail.com

Membership: Paul Stevens at the Great North Museum: Hancock, Barras Bridge, Newcastle, NE2 4PT. Tel. 0191 222 5031

Email: katherine.pinnock@twmuseums.org.uk

Mammal Recorders

If you have any records from walks, events or live trappings, please forward them onto the county mammal recorders, even the small piece of information can prove to be very useful. The county recorders are:

- Northumberland: ERIC (Environmental Records Information Centre North East), Great North Museum: Hancock, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4PT Tel: 0191 222 5158
Email: eric.ne@twmuseums.org.uk
- Durham: Don Griss, C/O Durham Wildlife Trust, Rainton Meadows, Chilton Moor, Houghton-le-Spring, Tyne & Wear, DH4 6PU Email: dmgriss@btinternet.com
- Cleveland: Jonathan Pounder, 88 Durham Street, Hartlepool, TS24 0HE Tel: (07980 581 437)
Email: jonathan_pounder@hotmail.com