

# CYLCHLYTHYR MAMALIAID ERYRI

## *SNOWDONIA MAMMAL GROUP NEWSLETTER*



Rhif 7

### Winter 2007

**Croeso! Welcome!** Welcome to the seventh newsletter of the Snowdonia Mammal Group. It seems that we've rolled our Autumn & Winter newsletters into one. Hopefully you'll all find something interesting. Thanks to everyone for their contributions as ever, and thank you all for your continued support, interest and enthusiasm for the Group and of course the Snowdonia Mammal Atlas.

### Mammal Atlas update

Records continue to come in towards the Mammal Atlas. We are now at the end of our third year of recording, so over half way. It doesn't seem like any time at all since we were just launching. Anyway, with the help of Cofnod, we will be producing a set of draft maps in the New Year which we are hoping to publicise as widely as possible. There is nothing like blank spaces to stimulate more records for those areas. Also, we will be hoping that mammal recorders in the area will try and target some of the gaps for their recording over the next season. Our training/events programme tries to address this, but it is difficult to find suitable parking places for public events where we have some of our biggest gaps. The draft maps will also highlight species for which we do not have very many records. I suspect many of these are because they are more difficult to record as much as that they are actually the rarer species.

We will send out a copy of the draft maps to everyone as soon as we have them and would appreciate all of your help in getting them out and about as far and wide as possible.

Please keep your records coming! Send them to [kate.willamson@eryri-npa.gov.uk](mailto:kate.willamson@eryri-npa.gov.uk).

### Bat Project update

As part of the Snowdonia Bat Project, which some of you have been involved in through kindly carrying out transects with bat detectors and recording equipment (please get in touch if you'd like to be involved in this!!!).

#### **Bat Detector transects**

This summer, volunteers walked a series of transects at dusk to record any bats passing using MP3 recorders attached to Duet Bat Detectors.

The recordings of the transects will be analysed over the winter via a series of workshops (see the Events Programme in this Newsletter) using a software programme called BatSound Analysis. This produces power spectrums and coloured spectrographs that aid the identification of the calls. The recordings will show the number of bat passes along the transects and tell us where hot spots of activity occur within the National Park.

We are expecting to show a widespread distribution of Pipistrelles and Lesser Horseshoes with some new records for Noctules, Long-eared, Natterers and Daubentons.

Of particular note was a recording of a Serotine over the dunes at Harlech that was confirmed with a classic Bat Sound Analysis spectrograph.

We are hoping that the transects may reveal more serotines and possibly Leislars, Nathusius Pipistrelles and Barbastelles!!!

### **Harp trapping**

Alongside the transect surveys we carried out a series of special nights using 2 or 3 Harp Traps (so called because they consist of a metal square frame that supports two banks of nylon strings below which is a big collecting bag and they look like a Harp!) each with a bat lure developed by Frank Greenaway, in a further attempt to record scarce woodland bats such as Barbastelle and Bechstein's. As these bats are woodland specialists, a number of key habitats were identified within the National Park for priority survey using this technique. This technique was done under a special project licence issued by the Countryside Council for Wales.

This was very much a pilot study and the Harp Trapping/Bat Lure gave us a few in the hand records of 45 + 55 Pips and Natterers but no other species. We hope for better weather and better choice of trapping sites next year with a focus on where we have bat detector records of Barbastelles.

### **Long Distance Horseshoes**

Following on from our account of Greater Horseshoes in this summer's newsletter, another unringed bat was found in October by Sarah Cartmel in a mine adit in Cwm Nantcol, again within 35 miles of the Conwy bats.

These long distance movements are unusual but probably vital to ensure gene interchange in a species where females normally always return to their birth roost to breed. The recent finds also give rise to the exciting possibility of a new colony starting in the North Wales especially if future winters remain as mild as those of recent years.

### **Scat Hunting goes International!**

A new project is currently being set up to try and record pine martens in England and Wales. This cross-border initiative is being led by the Vincent Wildlife Trust, in partnership with CCW, Waterford Institute of Technology and possibly Natural England too. As well as these bodies there are a number of marten workers from different areas of England and Wales acting as local co-ordinators. The project will run for 2 years, starting in the spring of 2008.

The idea is to send a large number of volunteers out into targeted areas to hunt for scats. These will then be sent over to Waterford for DNA analysis. In Wales, we have identified 8 areas to be looked at over the 2 years. As far as we are concerned there are 5 relevant areas in and around North Wales, 4 of which are in Snowdonia, so there is a big role for the Mammal Group to play here. Next year we will be looking at the Dyffryn Ffestiniog area and

Clocaenog forest. In 2009 we will try our luck in Gwydr Forest, Dyfi Forest and Aberhiraant/Penllyn area.

The Clocaenog survey date has already been set, (see training programme 2008), and we will be looking for as many people as possible to come along and help out. I will give more details nearer the time, but if nothing else, it's a lovely day out in the woods and you never know, you may be the one to prove the continued existence of the Snowdonia Marten.

**Here, Snowdonia Mammal Group volunteer Huw Jenkins, describes how the hunt has gone so far....**

If you think you're pregnant you can take a test. If you think you've got Pine Martens it's much harder to prove.

There have been lots of "good" sightings where good equals a high probability score on the Vincent Wildlife Trust checklist of questions as to what was seen. But concrete proof is elusive with the last dead body to be found in Wales more than fifty years ago.

Over the past year hair tubes have been mounted five feet up trees in the woods above Plas Tan y Bwlch and over in the Bala area, baited with chicken. The idea being to lure any Martens up the tube, leaving a few hairs on the sticky pads at the bottom in the process - but again, no success, with only squirrel hairs found, (grey of course).



Studying scats

But when the going gets tough, the tough get going and efforts to track down the Lord Lucan of Welsh mammals have been stepped up. A workshop was held in Waterford, Ireland in June 2006, for all Marten workers from England and Wales. In all these areas the numbers of Martens are thought to be very low and populations very sparsely distributed. How exactly are we going to go about finding them? By the end of the weekend we were no nearer the Holy Grail, but at least we had reinspired ourselves and reacquainted ourselves with what Pine Marten field signs actually look like.



Based on techniques discussed in Waterford, on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> November more than 30 sleuths descended on the Plas for a weekend operation scouring the woodlands for Marten scats.

Pine Marten Pete from Ireland gave us the results for a similar operation in the Aberystwyth area last summer when 36 scats were collected, frozen and analysed back at the Waterford Institute of Technology. Of the 17 scats able to be identified there were:

8 x fox  
3 x dog (including a miniature schnauser and a westie!)  
1 x polecat  
1 x pig or boar (it wasn't a dog that ate a bacon butty)  
1 x otter  
1 x crow  
1 x hedgehog  
1 x PINE MARTEN

Fantastic news after so many years of searching but in science one is a bit of a dodgy statistic needing corroboration.



To set the scene we were treated to a slideshow identity parade of scats with the most unlikely looking specimens turning out to be from Pine Martens. The archetypal scat is a hair pin or heart shaped twisted coil about the thickness of a finger but depending on diet and the amount of weathering they can come in many shapes and sizes. As Pete said "people here are grasping at straws and picking up all kinds of crap. They say otter spraints have a distinctive smell akin to Jasmine Tea but by the time I get

them they're often more like stewed Typhoo".

DNA analysis cuts through the "confusion" and provides conclusive evidence. But we are asked to be particularly careful when handling the scats to avoid cross contamination. Use a stick to prod it into the bag and make sure the outside of the bag is clean and sealed. The amount of scat used to get a DNA sequence is miniscule, about the size of a droplet of mist out of an aerosol can.

The most likely place for cross contamination to occur is in the laboratory but fortunately the DNA sequence for Irish Martens is different to the one in Scotland and England which in turn is different from a number of variations across Europe. A positive matching is always repeated with another sample to ensure it's not a mistake. For this reason the scat found by Bill Taylor (warden from Llyn Tegid) has not entered the record books - the once-off matching of the DNA sequence has not been repeatable.

Splitting into small teams the 30 sleuths set off into the autumn weather and surveyed woodland sites recording mammal signs in about 50 x 1 Km squares, a very valuable contribution to the Atlas project. As for scats the results were a mixed bag with 131 being passed on to Pete for analysis - by extrapolation from the Aberystwyth exercise we should have at least three and a half Pine Martens.

A great weekend was had by all with participants from all over including the Staffordshire mammal group which recently published its mammal atlas complete with Pine Marten. A good evening was had at the Oakeley Arms and as people made their way back to the Plas they could be heard singing ...

In the slate grey mountains of Snowdonia  
On the trail of the lonesome Pine ... Marten

**In addition, here's some extra information on the Pine Marten weekend...facts & stats!  
10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> November 2007**

Here are a few stats and things from the weekend. Thank you all once again for your participation. From our perspective it was great to see so many people out in the field. Pete and Catherine will be starting on the DNA analysis next week (3<sup>rd</sup> December), so fingers crossed.

5 sites were surveyed on the Saturday and 9 on the Sunday, but a total of 30 volunteers. This equated to 1,650 person hours spent in the field over the course of the weekend.

We managed to record mammals in 62 different 1km squares and 157 new Atlas records were generated. We recorded 14 different mammal species, with sheep (28), fox (27), field vole (26) and grey squirrel (20) being the most common.

*Hopefully this will rise to 15 species after the analysis is completed!*

25 scats were collected on the Saturday and 106 on the Sunday. All of these have been photographed and taken back to the DNA lab at Waterford Institute of Technology by Pete Turner.

We will let you know the DNA results as soon as we have them.

Cheers, Kate

## **Welsh Wildlife Article, by Rhian Hughes**

### **"Bright Eyes and Bushy Tails"**

North Wales Wildlife Trust is working to discover new dormouse sites in North Wales. Working in collaboration with the local councils potential sites are being surveyed and if they look like good "dormouse friendly" sites boxes will be erected. This has led to 3 sites in Conwy and 1 in Snowdonia National Park being investigated, the boxes here have now been erected and will be surveyed three times a year. A further 5 sites in Wrexham were



investigated and we are hoping to erect boxes here in the future. We are hoping that this will provide us with some positive results!



The dormouse work also involves looking at the habitat connections between woodlands. We know © Danny Green there is a large dormouse population present in a wood near Bontuchel, Ruthin and the surrounding woodlands are being investigated to see if there are also dormice present here. Since July dormice have been found in three of these woods which is extremely exciting news. Many of the dormice in Bontuchel have been microchipped (working with

Chester Zoo and Cheshire Wildlife Trust). This investigates the movement of dormice and whether the dormice in the surrounding woodlands are from Bontuchel woods and if they are willing to move this far, or if they are separate populations.

Studies of the habitat connections are also taking place around the Chwiler Valley and in the Conwy Valley.

Other surveys include the Chwiler valley woodlands, this year we had 29 dormice in September which is the most dormice we have found in Flintshire.

During the winter we will be maintaining the boxes, making new ones and possibly erecting some new boxes. This is also the best time of year to do a nut hunt, looking for dormouse chewed hazelnuts, nut hunts will be taking place so if you are interested please



contact Rhian.

If you are interested in helping please contact

[rhianhughes@wildlifetrustswales.org](mailto:rhianhughes@wildlifetrustswales.org)

and please see the website for more information

<http://www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/northwales/>

## Nibbled nuts! By Kate (a wedi cyfiethu gan Bryn Griffiths, diolch!)

*Adeg yma o'r flwyddyn fe ddylai bod digon o gnau a cherrig ffrwythau o gwmpas, sy'n newyddion da i gofnodwyr mamaliaid bychan. Cnau cyll yw'r cnau nodweddiadol a ddangosir mewn llyfrau, ond rydym ni wedi gallu adnabod olion mamaliaid bychan o gerrig ceirios, eirin du ac o gerrig ffrwythau drain du a gwyn. Chwilotwch ar lawr y goedwig, yn enwedig dan, ac oddi cwmpas, coed ffrwythau ac mewn unrhyw dyllau yn y goeden i weld be y darganfyddwch. Mae'r wybodaeth isod yn ymwneud â chnau cyll ond mae hefyd yn berthnasol i gerrig/cnau eraill hefyd:*

*Mae'r man ble y gwelwch y gneuen yn helpu i ddarganfod pa rywogaeth sydd wrth ei waith. Mae pathewod bob amser yn daclus wrth agor cnau cyll aeddfed, gan wneud hyn yng nghanghennau'r goeden. O ganlyniad bydd plisgyn ("husk") y gneuen fel arfer yn gyflawn. Bydd llygoden y coed a'r llygoden bengron goch fel arfer yn casglu'r cnau hyn a'u cuddio mewn tyllau yn y llawr oddi tan y goeden. Yn aml nid yw'r plisgyn i'w cael ar y cnau hyn. Bydd wiwerod yn cyrchu'r llwyni cyn i'r cnau aeddfedu a'u hollti'n agored. Yn hwyrach ymlaen yn yr hydref byddant yn chwilota dros lawr y goedwig am gnau sydd wedi disgyn gan eu bwyta yn yr agored neu'n eu claddu ar gyfer y gaeaf.*

*Os ydych yn ansicr ynglŷn â chnau rydych wedi'u gweld, gyrrwch nhw i mi yn swyddfa'r Parc Cenedlaethol os gwelwch yn dda, wedi'u labelu yn ofalus gyda dyddiad pryd y casglwyd hwy a chyfeirnod grid o'r man y casglwyd hwy, ac mi wnawn ni geisio rhoi gwybod i chi pa greadur sydd 'di bod yn cnoi!*

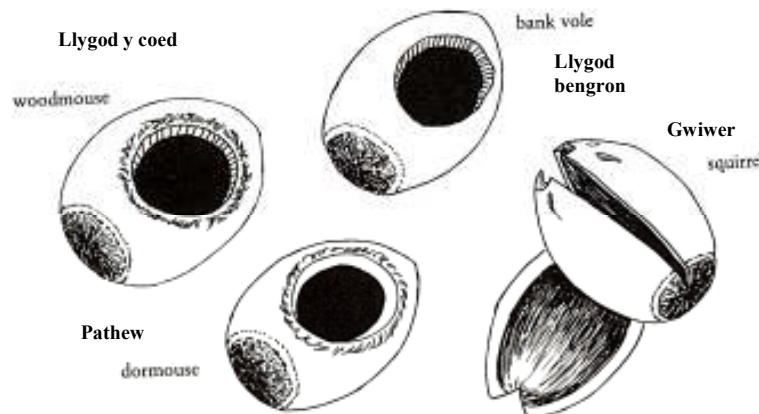
This time of year there should be plenty of nuts, pips and fruit stones around, which is good news for small mammal recording. Hazel nuts are the typical nuts in most books, but we have also been able to record small mammal species from cherry, sloe, damson and even hawthorn. Have a rummage around on the woodland floor, particularly under and around fruit trees and in any holes or hollows, and see what you can find. The information below pertains to hazel nuts, but it follows for the other stones/nuts too.

Where you find the nut helps identify the species involved. Dormice are always very neat when opening ripe hazel nuts and always do so in the branches of the hazel bush. As a result the dropped nut often has the husk intact.

Bank voles and woodmice mostly handle fallen nuts and will cache them in hollows by the base of trees. In many cases these nuts do not have the husk associated with them.

Squirrels raid the bushes before the nuts are ripe and cleave them open. Latter in the autumn they forage on the ground for fallen nuts and may eat them in the open or bury them for the winter.

Cnau  
marciau  
Nibbled  
marks:

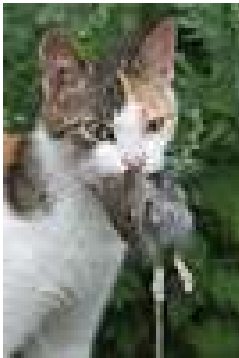


wedi'u cnoi -  
nodweddiadol:  
nuts -  
characteristic

If you are unsure about any nuts you have found, please send them in to me at the National Park office, carefully labelled with a date you found them and a grid reference of where you found them, and we will try to let you know which critter was nibbling them!

## Does your cat bring you presents? By Becky Groves

Longworth trapping is the most obvious way of surveying for small mammals, such as voles and mice. But there are other, easier and less obvious ways in which you can record small mammals.



We all know that cats can often bring you unwanted presents, which they seem to get in spite of your best efforts to fit them a bell! The small mammals that they bring in are a good indicator of the small mammals that are found in the surrounding countryside and can help fill in gaps in the atlas.



If your cat brings in a small mammal please let us know about it, so we can fill in gaps for species that are probably common, but more difficult to record. Species that cats may catch include: field vole, bank vole, house mouse, wood mouse, yellow necked mouse, dormouse, rat, common shrew, pygmy shrew and water shrew. We have made up an identification sheet of all of these mammals - if you have a cat please let us know and we'll send you a free ID sheet. If your cat brings in one of the mammals then please either email or write to us to let us know. If you are not sure what the mammal is, then if you can take a photo and send it to us and we'll identify it for you.

These cards will also be distributed in vet practices, pet shops and households where certain small mammals may be present nearby.

If you would like an ID card please contact Kate Williamson on: [Kate.Williamson@eryri-npa.gov.uk](mailto:Kate.Williamson@eryri-npa.gov.uk) Telephone: 01766 772255

## Bring back the Beavers

They've been gone from Wales for so many years they are better known as cartoon characters felling trees with chain saw teeth and plastering dams with trowel like tails. But go to the continent and you will have a chance to see them. In the past 70 years 27 countries across Europe have reintroduced beavers.

By the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century they had been hunted to extinction in Wales and almost wiped out across Europe. The pelts were much sought after, with 23,000 hairs per square centimetre they were exceedingly good at keeping you warm and dry. The meat is very tasty and Roman Catholic tradition allowed it to be served on Fridays as an alternative to fish. Beavers produce castoreum, which was used as a general purpose remedy, the key component of which comes from chewing the bark off willow trees also used in the production of aspirin.

If re-introduced they are unlikely to go unnoticed. They're very big, weighing 25 Kg and the largest rodent in the Northern hemisphere. Their dams would be another tell-tale sign. These are built obviously to raise the level of water. Nothing to do with fishing as they're entirely herbivorous, but it is connected with food. They don't hibernate and need to feed throughout the winter. To this end their front door is always underwater to give them safe access to their larder even when the surface has frozen over.

Britain can make impetuous decisions and be quick to go to war but why is it so slow in bringing back the beavers? The debate and consultation has been going on in Wales, Scotland and England for years. With so much public interest in wildlife and the development of eco-tourism surely it's a no-brainer?

Crops? If there is a tasty field of maize or sugar beet next to the river then some is bound to be eaten. But only some, and the most likely parts of Wales for reintroducing beavers will not be into arable farming.

Fish? Surely the fish will suffer and not be able to get upstream to their spawning grounds? They managed very well for millions of years until man spoilt things. A beaver dam is passable and also provides good fish habitat and sanctuary during droughts.

Flooding? Surely the dams will cause flooding? The course of streams and rivers will change a bit but not radically. In some countries the beavers are being incorporated into the flood management system with the network of dams reducing the risk and impact of a flood surge.

Biting? True, you don't want to get bitten by a beaver with its self-sharpening incisors. If they can chew down trees think what they could do to a finger! They are not going to be looking for trouble and unless you try and pick one up (25 Kg!) there is little risk of conflict.

Disease? There is a risk that beavers could be conveyors of disease as with all creatures, including humans.

The reason why we don't have any beavers is because we liked them so much and hunted them to extinction. Unlike other extinct species the habitat is still in place ready for a reintroduction. So why don't we just get on and do it, bring them back? All talk and no action - hardly being busy beavers.

**Editor's note: Thank you to whoever wrote this excellent article! Apologies for the lack of credit, but unfortunately your name got lost in cyberspace somewhere, very sorry! Possibly you Huw J?**

## Cymorth i'r Ysgyfarnog

*Ymhlith y nifer o brosiectau gwerthfawr a weithredir gan Ymddiriedolaeth Natur Gogledd Cymru ar hyn o bryd mae'r Prosiect Ysgyfarnog. Bwriad y prosiect yw gwrth-droi'r dirywiad trist a welwyd ym mhoblogaeth yr ysgyfarnog ers y 1960au. Mi ddaethpwyd â'r ysgyfarnog i Brydain o gyfandir Ewrop dros 2000 o flynyddoedd yn ôl. Roedd yr ysgyfarnog yn gysegredig i'r Celtiaid.*

*Maent yn gyfrinachgar ac yn wibiog, ond hefyd yn gyfeillgar, ac wedi'u cofnodi fel anifeiliaid anwes da.*

*Mae duwies hynafol y gwanwyn, Eostre (o ble daw'r enw Saesneg Easter), yn cydnabod yr ysgyfarnog fel ei symbol cysegredig. Ond heddiw fe welwn y gwingen fel symbol y Pasg yn hytrach na'r ysgyfarnog. Mae sawl chwedl Cymraeg yn sôn am ysgyfarnogod. Gallai gwrachod droi i mewn i ysgyfarnogod a sugno llefrith y fuwch yn y cae. Yn y Mabinogi, diancodd Gwion o'r gwrachod am y tro cyntaf drwy droi mewn i ysgyfarnog.*

*Yn wahanol i gwingod, sydd o'r un teulu ond yn aml yn bla, bydd ysgyfarnogod yn byw ar y tir agored yn hytrach na thyllu. Maent yn hoff o dir fferm draddodiadol yn yr iseldir; caeau bychan gyda chnydau â'r cymysg ac anifeiliaid, wedi'u hamgylchynu gan ffosydd a gwrychoedd. Er mwyn goroesi, bydd yr ysgyfarnog yn cwrcwd yn llonydd, y nerfau yn dal hyd nes y bydd y perygl yn hynod agos, pryd y bydd yn gwibio i ffwrdd ar gyflymder o tua 80 cilomedr yr awr. Wrth redeg, gall yr ysgyfarnog neidio i naill ochr neu'r llall i ddrysu llwynogod neu gŵn sy'n dilyn. Bydd hyn i'w weld gyda'r arferiad o hela ysgyfarnogod gyda milgwn. Yn y gwanwyn, yn ystod y tymor paru, byddant yn rhedeg ac yna'n stopio, gan fynd ar eu coesau ôl i "focsio" (fel arfer y fenyw yn ceisio troi'r gwryw i ffwrdd). Mae'r ddelwedd o 'ysgyfarnog wyllt y gwanwyn' yn fythgofiadwy pan gyfarfu ag Alice yn y te parti yn 'Alice in Wonderland'.*

*Gall y fenyw gael hyd at 4 lefren bob haf. Mae'r rhai ifanc yn gorwedd yn guddiedig mewn pantiau bach. Dim ond unwaith y dydd, pan fydd yr haul yn machlud, y cant eu bwydo gan y fam.*

*Fel llawer iawn o'n bywyd gwyllt ni sy'n diflannu, eu cwmp yw eu bod yn ddibynnol ar ymarferion ffermio traddodiadol. Mae ffermio dwys, defnydd o blaladdwyr, cael eu trawo gan geir a chynnydd mewn llwynogod a bwncathod i gyd wedi cael effaith negyddol. Mae tywydd gwlyb yn ystod yr haf hefyd yn lleihau nifer y rhai ifanc sy'n byw.*

*Mae Ymddiriedolaeth Natur Gogledd Cymru (mewn partneriaeth â Chyngor Cefn Gwlad Cymru a Bioamrywiaeth Cymru) yn monitro niferoedd ysgyfarnogod. Mae'n gofyn i ddarllenwyr a welodd ysgyfarnog yn y misoedd diwethaf i'w helpu drwy gysylltu â nhw (e-bost: [nwwt@cix.co.uk](mailto:nwwt@cix.co.uk) neu ffoniwch 01248 351541).*

*Yn wahanol i'r hyn a ofnwyd ynghynt, mae'n ymddangos fod eu niferoedd nawr wedi sefydlogi, yn enwedig yn Sir Fôn a Phen Llŷn ble mae ymarferion ffermio traddodiadol yn tueddu i barhau. Mae rhai ohonom sydd heb gael y cyfle i weld y creaduriaid gwych hyn; gwyliwch yn ofalus am bâr o glustiau hir gyda du ar ben y glust, ffwr brown cynnes a llygaid euraidd yn crwydro drwy'r caeau.*

*Victor Pentraeth  
Llangybi*

## **Help for the Brown Hare**

Among the many valuable projects currently being undertaken by the North Wales Wildlife Trust is the Brown Hare Project. The plan is to reverse the sad decline in hare numbers which has occurred since the 1960s.

The brown hare (ysgyfarnog) was brought from Europe to Britain over two thousand years ago. Celtic ancestors held them sacred. They are secretive and elusive, but also gentle and friendly, recorded as making lovely pets. The ancient spring goddess Eostre (Easter) honoured the hare as her sacred symbol. But today we see 'Easter bunny' instead.

In Welsh mythology there are many tales of hares. Witches could turn into hares and suck the cow's milk in the pastures. In the Mabinogion, Gwion's first escape from the clutch of the witch is by turning into a hare.

Unlike their close and pest-common cousins, the rabbits, hares don't burrow but live on open land. They prefer traditional lowland farm environments; small fields with mixed arable crops and livestock protected by solid stone hedgerows and ditches.

Their survival strategy is to crouch dead still, nerves holding until danger is very close, but then sprint off at speeds approaching 80 km/hr. In full flight they may suddenly make huge sideways jumps to confuse chasing foxes or dogs. The practice of hare coursing with greyhounds watches this spectacle. At mating time in spring they chase then stop, rearing on hind legs to 'box' (normally a female discouraging the advances of unwanted males). The 'mad March hare' was immortalised when it met Alice in Wonderland for a tea party. The females may have up to four summer litters of four leverets each year. The young lie concealed in small depressions (forms). They are only fed once a day, at sunset, by the mother.

Like so much of our disappearing wildlife, their dependence on the traditional farming methods has been their downfall. The changes to intensive farming, pesticides, road kills and the increases in predatory foxes and buzzards are all to blame. Wet summer weather reduces the survival of young.

The North Wales Wildlife Trust (in association with the Countryside Council for Wales and Biodiversity Wales) is currently monitoring hare numbers. It is asking for readers who have seen a hare in recent months to help by letting them know (email. [nwwt@cix.co.uk](mailto:nwwt@cix.co.uk) or ring 01248 351541). Contrary to previous fears it's emerging that their numbers may have stabilised, particularly on Anglesey and parts of Llŷn which have maintained the more traditional farm practices.

Some of us may not yet have been lucky enough to have seen these beautiful animals; keep a watch for that pair of long black tipped ears, warm brown fur and golden eyes pottering through the pasture.

Victor Pentraeth  
Llangybi

## The End Of An Era....

Since it's conception in July 2000, the Dwyryd Otter Partnership has gone from strength to strength. Originally composed of a handful of volunteers carrying out a monthly monitoring programme on the central section of the Afon Dwyryd, the project soon grew to cover the entire



catchment, from the mountains to the sea. The aim of this monitoring was to anticipate any problems that the expanding otter population may encounter in a habitat that had probably changed significantly since the otter was last a widespread animal. This was however only

the start of what was soon to become probably the largest volunteer based otter project in the UK. The analysis of the spraints collected by the volunteers revealed marine prey species in the otters' dietary composition, some of them some considerable distance from the sea. This not only allayed fears that the recovering otter population could encounter seasonal prey deficiencies, but also opened the doors for a further and more ambitious expansion of the project. At this point I decided that I could no longer manage the project single-handedly and a management team was formed to take the project into its new phase.

At the time the spraint analysis was carried out, CCW had recently completed a Phase 1 inter-tidal survey of the coast of Wales, (seaweed & stuff). This revealed that some areas of the coast of the Lleyn peninsula had a very similar habitat to parts of coastal Scotland where otters extensively use the marine environment for foraging. There followed a coastal survey of the Lleyn, funded by PTES followed soon afterwards by a survey of the SNP coast, which is a very different habitat. All spraints were collected for analysis to aid research into prey biomass and availability. These surveys were enormously successful and were to be the catalyst for an ambitious survey programme funded by CCW Species Challenge Fund. This was to involve further coastal surveys in year one, altering the time of year from the original surveys to further establish prey species taken by otters. Year two involved surveys of upland lakes and year three the habitat between the lakes and the sea. Year two brought water voles into the equation, followed by the addition of bats in year three.

All of the above work involved a massive volunteer effort, which in turn required an equally massive training effort. Since the very beginning, the partnership has had a strong commitment to training volunteers and initially trained the team in otter surveying, habitat mapping and artificial holt building. The holt building was particularly successful and one holt was used for breeding within the first year, leading to two cubs, known as the twins becoming a regular sight on the Dwyryd. As the project grew, spraint analysis training was also introduced as by now we had literally hundreds to analyse, from both coastal and upland sites. Eventually we will be producing a CD of digital images of prey remains in spraints to assist other conservation bodies and individuals in their research. This should be a vast improvement on the literature currently available.

With the completion of the above work, combined with the impressive and largely unaided recovery of the otter population, we began to question the need for an organisation dealing solely with otters. The formation of the Snowdonia Mammal Group provided the means to carry out further otter work, should it be required, and the members of the management teams of both organisations were all the same people. It was therefore decided at a recent meeting of all members of the management teams to integrate the Afon Dwyryd Otter Partnership with the Snowdonia Mammal Group. This will certainly mean that the administration is a lot more streamlined and reduce the workload on all of the individuals involved.

So finally, a huge thankyou to all of the volunteers who accomplished so much in such a short space of time.



## Creature Feature, by Rob Strachan

### The Enigmatic Water Shrew - an Under-recorded Animal

Mostly a solitary species, the water shrew is the largest of the three species of shrew found in Britain, and is adapted to a semi-aquatic lifestyle with a fringe of stiff hairs on its tail and feet. Its dorsal pelage is grey-black, contrasting with a striking white underbelly. White ear tufts may also be present.



Water shrew populations are ephemeral and patchily distributed, and their range and status are poorly known. Although they are widely distributed in Britain, water shrews appear to be scarce across much of Wales. They have been recorded from coastal wetlands and grazing marshes, together with rivers and valley floodplains of most catchments. A few

upland sites have also been found to support them, but they are likely to be under-recorded throughout their range.

They are generally found close to water, mainly clean, fast-flowing streams and rivers where there may be abundant invertebrate prey. Water meadows beside gravelly streams provide ideal habitats, but there have been few studies to confirm this. Water shrews have also been recorded as far as 3 kilometres away from water, where they may occur as temporary visitors in woodlands, grasslands, and occasionally in farmland, where hedgerows are thought to provide important corridors for movement. There are no rigorous data on water shrew habitat preferences. However a study from southeast England suggests that they prefer steep banks, herb cover, current speeds of between 0.5 and 0.75 metres per second, with depths of up to 0.25 metres. However, they are found in a wide range of sites, which suggests a high degree of adaptability and the use of habitats with a variety of characteristics.



Water shrews excavate extensive burrow systems in

the banks of streams, rivers, and drainage ditches, although they will also use mole tunnels and the burrows of bank voles and mice. The burrow entrance may be above or below water level, from which the shrew regularly sallies forth in search of aquatic prey that is frequently collected from the river bed (caddisfly larvae are particularly favoured, and piles of empty cases may be cached at the burrow entrance). Water shrews feed mostly on aquatic crustaceans and insect larvae, terrestrial beetles, molluscs, worms, and occasionally small fishes, amphibia, and mammals. A 15 gram water shrew consumes 50% of its body weight daily, and can subsist entirely on terrestrial prey when living away from water. The diet of the water shrew overlaps considerably with those of both the common and pygmy shrews.

Nests, consisting of a ball of vegetation, are made within the burrow system and are used for sleeping and for rearing young. The water shrew's breeding season is between April and September, with a peak in births during May-June. Litter size is 6-8 young, and two litters may be reared each year. The young may remain with the mother for up to 40 days. The life span is short, and juvenile mortality during dispersal, as well as adult mortality during the breeding season, is high. Predators include foxes, cats, herons, owls, and even large trout.

Changes in water quality, such as acidification, eutrophication, sewage pollution or farm run-off, may be a significant threat to water shrews. Pollution incidents may severely affect prey availability in the short term. Deterioration in the quality of riverbank vegetation may also have negative effects, by reducing cover and food. Sympathetic management is therefore a key factor in realizing the potential of any water shrew habitat.

Where are our water shrews in Snowdonia? Perhaps an analysis of owl pellets or what the cat brings in will help (see article in this Newsletter!).

## **A letter from Mike Griffiths, Wrexham**

Dear Kate

Recently I was with my wife and daughter in the Harlech area. We returned home on the A496 and stopped off at a pumping station near Maentwrog at a place I'm told is Coed Camlyn, a beautiful piece of woodland adjacent to the pumping station. The station, if I've got it correct, has a huge pipeline that feeds it from over the mountain.

We walked a few yards into the woodland along the public footpath and sat on the seats overlooking the river. My daughter spotted what she first thought to be a young duckling swimming in a pool below us. It had a very strange way about it.

After some time I scrambled down the bank and from the waters edge I could clearly see it was a long-eared bat swimming in the pool using its wings to do a sort of butterfly stroke like humans do in the baths.

It swam for ages around the pool and eventually climbed out onto a log that lay on the far side of the pool and then it went higher onto another log and shook itself. It carried on shaking itself and climbing higher into the foliage until the last sight of it. We waited for sometime in the hope that it might come out again, but it didn't. This happened about 4pm on August 27<sup>th</sup> 2007. We assumed it was a juvenile bat as my daughter Rachael had seen it chasing dragonflies about this area of the river prior to the swimming. We can only assume that it chased a dragonfly and hit the water.

What was so annoying was that I had an expensive camera with me but I only had a wide angle lense on it having decided to leave the better long lense away in the car. I therefore missed the shot of my lifetime through a bad decision.

Hope you are well.

Yours sincerely

Mike

Mike Griffiths

**Of interest....**



A dead weasel sent in by Rhys Gwynn. (I think he set up the pose!)



A photo sent in by Allan Brandon, North Wales Odonata recorder. Allan says that he photographed this Aesculapian snake (*Elaphe longissima*) constricting a water vole in the sub-Pyrenees in August. Does anyone know whether the rodent is our own species or a southern European one?

*Answer by Rob Strachan: Yes, definitely a water vole. The range of the Southern water vole extends from Brittany through to the Iberian peninsula, while the northern water vole ranges from central France east to the North Tien Shan mountains of China and south from the mountains of the eastern Mediterranean Region to the Arctic coast (including mainland UK). However, there is an overlap of the two within the Pyrenees (as an outpost of the Northern water vole). To determine which species that you saw in the sub-Pyrenees requires the careful measurement of the skull and teeth! Southern water voles have bigger skulls - condylobasal length over 40mm, maxillary tooth row over 10mm and nasals wider than 4.75mm. Measurements of the northern water vole are smaller than the above, otherwise they look exactly the same.*

*In other words - the vole you saw could be either species...*

(Does anyone else have any interesting pictures that they've taken or questions that they'd like answering?)

## Up and Coming Events

As previously mentioned, it was decided that instead of having set species-specific training as part of the Mammal Atlas project, that there would be guided walks where all participants can get involved in recording mammals in certain pre-organised areas. The following is the provisional training and events programme for 2008, plus extra events not specifically part of the Atlas. Contact Kate to book.

Training & Events Programme for 2008

EVENT	DATE	LEADER	VENUE
Bat Sound Workshop	Sat 12 <sup>th</sup> Jan 10am - 4pm	Rob Strachan/ Jan Baylis	Plas Tan y Bwlch AV room
Bat Sound Workshop	Sun 10 <sup>th</sup> Feb 10am - 4pm	Rob Strachan/ Jan Baylis	Plas Tan y Bwlch AV room
<b>SMG meeting</b>	<b>Thurs 21<sup>st</sup> Feb 7pm - 9pm</b>	<b>Kate Williamson</b>	<b>Plas Tan y Bwlch Auditorium</b>
Recording walk	Sun 24 <sup>th</sup> Feb	Rob Strachan	SH5750 Beddgelert Forest
Recording walk	Sat 15 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Chris Hall	SH7341 Hafod Fawr
Mammal Recording Workshop	19 <sup>th</sup> /20 <sup>th</sup> Apr	Rob Strachan/ Kate Williamson	Centre for Alternative Technology
Recording walk	Sun 27 <sup>th</sup> Apr	Chris Hall	SH7341 Y Garnedd
Bat Survey Workshop	2 <sup>nd</sup> - 4 <sup>th</sup> May	Chris Hall/ Rob Strachan	Plas Tan y Bwlch AV room
Recording walk	Sun 25 <sup>th</sup> May	Huw Jenkins	SH6938 Coed Caersaeson
Recording walk	Sat 21 <sup>st</sup> June	Kate Williamson	SH8515 Foel Dinas
Recording walk	Sun 13 <sup>th</sup> July	Sam Dyer	SH7366 Cefn Tal-llyn-Eigiau
Mammals and Woodlands Course	Sat 19 <sup>th</sup> July	Kate Williamson/ Jack Grasse	Centre for Alternative Technology
Recording walk	Sun 10 <sup>th</sup> Aug	Sam Dyer	SH8050 East Penmachno
Pine Marten Scat Survey	23 <sup>rd</sup> or 24 <sup>th</sup> Aug	Kate Williamson/ Sarah Cartmel	Clochaenog Forest
Recording walk	Sat 6 <sup>th</sup> Sept	Jan Baylis	SH8324 Foel Ddu
Recording walk	Sun 5 <sup>th</sup> Oct	Jan Baylis	SH6504 Dolgoch

Recording walk

Sun 9<sup>th</sup> Nov

Rob Strachan

SH6708

Mynydd Pennant

## **Final Word**

Another plea for help with translation please! If you are able to translate some (or all!?) of the newsletters we produce, or know of someone who might be willing, please let us know.

If you would like to contribute to this newsletter through articles, drawings, photos, editing, please contact us. Thanks!

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