

# CYLCHLYTHYR MAMALIAID ERYRI

## SNOWDONIA MAMMAL GROUP NEWSLETTER



RHIF/NO. 8

**Croeso! Welcome!** Welcome to the eighth newsletter of the Snowdonia Mammal Group. 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

We now have over 10,300 records on the Mammal Atlas database but there are still plenty of gaps. The most recent maps that we have generated show that the coverage for bat species in particular has improved over the past year, which is to be expected with the focus of the bat project. The easier to record species are also improving, like field voles, moles and foxes, however, other relatively common species still have big recording gaps, e.g. grey squirrels. Species such as the water vole and feral goat are probably complete, as far as they will ever be. In fact, water voles have probably contracted in their range from the distribution we now show!

We still need to follow up on a number of different leads for existing datasets and if anyone can help us with this we would be very grateful. We have started to think about publication and writing up. We have a draft outline for the finished product and will start doing some of the background research now.

Please keep your records coming! Send them to [harlechkate@aol.com](mailto:harlechkate@aol.com).

### 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 still be involved in this next year!!!).

The 2008 bat project survey period got off to an excellent start with bat call sound analysis training workshops being well attended in January and February. All the transect recordings kindly completed by so many of you in 2007 have now been analysed with some interesting results, including serotine and possibly a leislars being recorded.

Early May saw the first of this years bat survey workshops, giving training in 'sonic memory' (an excellent way of breaking down bat detector calls into components, to help you identify what you are listening to in the field), equipment use and survey technique. Following the workshop a number of transects were completed giving a brilliant opportunity to put what we had just learnt into practice, with the groups bat experts on hand to answer any tricky

questions as we went! The following morning saw more bat call analysis training and produced lots more records for the atlas!

There have been five harp trapping sessions this year, and without wanting to speak to soon, it seems that we have learnt from last years trapping sessions; species trapped this year include brown long-eared, common pipistrelle, Daubenton's, Natterer's (pictured right), noctule, soprano pipistrelle, whiskered/Brandt's, alas still no barbastelles or Bechstein's though!



While harp trapping was paused for the summer months to prevent injury to bats which were heavily pregnant or with young, and August's non-stop rain prevented trapping, September looked like a good opportunity to increase the data. Another bat training/recording/analysis weekend was held recently. Watch this space for the results!

Despite the weather there is still lots we can all do to add bat records to the atlas, in particular continuing the essential transects, utilising the Duet bat detectors and MP3 recorders. If you would like to get involved or if you have kit and would like more transect maps close to where you live, they are available from Kate Williamson ([harlechkate@aol.com](mailto:harlechkate@aol.com)).

Several members of the group have recently been trialling a new method of surveying bats within in Snowdonia. This is via car based transects, utilising the Anabat system. This is a bat detection system built in Australia and is a high accuracy frequency division detector. Its advantage is that when used in conjunction with PDA and GPS unit, calls can be logged as you drive giving date, time and exact location of each call. The software which operates with the Anabat system allows very rapid species analysis and even faster spreadsheets to be produced displaying all the collected data. Hundreds of calls can be recorded in many atlas squares, analysed and processed, all within a couple of hours! So far the only disadvantages of this system is the slight bias towards recording the 'louder' species and the geographical coverage being concentrated on roads, however it is felt that while it does not replace the 'traditional' transects methods, the generation of so many good records over such large areas must be positive!



So far, over four evenings, 145km has been driven, resulting in 591 bat records of species including, common pipistrelle, noctule, soprano pipistrelle and whiskered/Brandt's. The map shows all records from car transects plotted in Google Earth.

Incidentally, in the interest of being 'green' all transects were completed on the return journey from other events/surveys and were not driven for their own sake.

We still have a lot of work to do with more harp trapping and many more transects to complete, so if you would like to get involved in any part of the bat project please get in touch!

### The Creature Feature - Commensal rodents

The 'creature feature' in this issue actually concentrates on two different mammals, the common (brown) rat; (*Rattus norvegicus*) and the house mouse; (*Mus domesticus*), both of which are supposedly very common. The recently published 'Mammals of the British Isles Handbook (4<sup>th</sup> edition) describes the house mouse as being the most widely distributed mammal on the planet with the exception of humans. The results of our recording for the mammal atlas however suggest a very different picture. So far the house mouse appears to be the rarest mammal in Snowdonia with only one record, and that came from the analysis of an otter spraint collected from Llyn Crafnant. The only place I have ever seen house mice on a regular basis is on the London Underground where they can often be seen foraging between the rail tracks. They can also be seen in the enclosures of other animals in London zoo. It is theoretically possible that Snowdonia is simply too rural for this species creating a type of habitat fragmentation due to the distance between suitable properties. Modern methods of food storage may also play a part. It is very difficult for a mouse to get into your fridge compared with the previously more accessible nature of the pantry with food lying around on shelves. Tinned goods may also play a part as these are totally inaccessible to small rodents. It is however also possible that the animal is simply under-recorded, partly due to the fact that our survey effort is not concentrated on peoples kitchens, and partly due to a reluctance to admitting that this so called 'vermin' species is thriving in your house. This latter factor could also apply to the rat. (I freely admit to seeing rats in my garden, so come on, own up!) There is a frequently quoted myth that you are 'never more than ten metres from a rat'. This distance varies depending on who you are talking to but the general implication is that the animal is extremely common. So where are all the records? Maybe Snowdonia is also too rural for this species, particularly when you consider the dominance of livestock as opposed to arable farming which does not supply the animals with such readily available food sources.

The winter should be a good time for recording these two commensal species as the cold weather tends to attract them to the relative warmth of your house and there is also a tendency for people to feed the birds in cold weather which could also be an attractant.

### House Mouse

A mouse in your house is not however always a house mouse. I frequently get wood mice; (*Apodemus sylvaticus*) running around in the loft so it is important to accurately identify any small rodents you may encounter. The house mouse is much greyer than the wood mouse and is only slightly paler on the underside compared with the almost white belly of the wood mouse. Unfortunately this coloration is very similar to juvenile wood mice but the house mouse has a slimmer head and smaller ears and eyes. The tail of the house mouse also has a thicker tail that is more scaly



in appearance than those of the other mice. Identification from field signs alone is difficult and probably unreliable due to the close similarity with those of other mouse species.

### Brown Rat



Most people are generally familiar with the appearance of the brown rat and the only other species it could possibly be confused with in Snowdonia is the water vole; (*Arvicola terrestris*). The rat however is easy to distinguish with a pointed snout as opposed to the blunt nose of the water vole. The rat also has very prominent ears and a long, sparsely furred, scaly tail which is only just shorter

than its combined head and body length. Very young rats can possibly be confused with house mice being a very similar greyish colour but the young rat will have much larger hind feet than the mouse as in most rodents the hind feet reach adult size at a very young age. The rat also grows considerably larger than the water vole with an adult rat weighing in at around 600g compared with just under 200g for the water vole. The largest rat ever recorded weighed 794g, (Harris & Yalden) which while quite large doesn't add much credibility to reports of rats as big as cats. Although this introduced rat species shows a fairly heavy reliance on human habitations to provide it with an enhanced food source, rats can be found some distance from humans and can also be found living along hedgerows and water courses. It is also feasible to record the presence of rats by some of their field signs although their foot prints are very difficult to distinguish from those of the water vole, even when perfect prints are found. Rat burrows are fairly distinctive and although at 6-9cm in width they are similar in size to those of the water vole, the rat leaves a spoil heap outside the burrow whereas the water vole tends to eject the spoil into the water making the burrow less obvious.

### Recording Brown Rats & House Mice

Due to the scarcity of records we currently hold for these two species we are attempting to rectify this situation this winter. As previously stated, this is a good time of the year to record both species as the cold weather tends to drive them closer to, or even into human habitations in search of both food and shelter. One means of recording rats and mice is from cat kills as they are particularly efficient hunters, (are also good at being sick on your diary). This gives a good opportunity to closely examine the animal making doubly sure that an accurate identification is achieved. Many cats also bring their prey to their owners as presents on a regular basis. Sent as a separate attachment to this news letter is a recording form specifically designed for recording cat kills. There is also a chance that this will reveal the presence of other under-recorded small mammals as cats are such efficient hunters. We would be most grateful if you could use this form to record any victims of your cats activities, and if you do not have a cat, print out a few copies and give them to someone who does.

## Scat Hunting goes International!

A project is underway 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, and started in the spring of 2008.

Surveys were completed for year 1 in Clochaenog and Dyffryn Ffestiniog (in North Wales), this year we will be tackling Dyfi forest, Aberhiraent and Gwydr. We would welcome any volunteers for these surveys and dates have been pencilled in for 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1<sup>st</sup> Aug and 22<sup>nd</sup> August. For more info contact kate on [harlechkate@aol.com](mailto:harlechkate@aol.com)

## Nuclear Mammal Walk - by Huw Jenkins

On Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> May with rain clouds closing in, sixteen brave souls met up for a mammal detective walk starting at the car park between the nuclear reactor towers and Llyn Trawsfynydd, Wales's third largest lake. The party included ten members of the North Wales Wildlife Trust gaining experience for their adopted square near Brithdir.



The first dam was built for the hydroelectric station at Maentwrog which opened in 1928. Subsequently the lake was made even bigger to cool the nuclear reactors - they needed 35,000 gallons an hour! That's why every other UK nuclear power station has been built on the coast.

We began our mammal search not far from the pump house where the water used to be extracted. Opposite the pump house is an L shaped embankment

that runs a thousand metres or so to the West, part of a series of piers and embankments around the lake to aid the circulation and dispersal of hot water away from the reactor end.

The warm water caused the fish to feed deep in the cooler waters and local anglers adapted their techniques accordingly. Power generation lasted for just 26 years until 1991 and these days the lake is returning to its natural state, with the fish once more feeding on the surface. It's always been an important fishing venue and this year will host the international competition between Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland.



Before lunch we surveyed the three squares running alongside the lake from the power station to the dam wall. Nothing particularly unusual to report, maybe not as many fox scats as usual but there is a lot of fox hunting here.

The usual suspects were present:

Square 1	Square 2	Square 3
Field Vole	Field Vole	Fox
Rabbit	Brown Hare	Otter
Squirrel	Fox	Bank Vole
Weasel	Mole	Wood Mouse
Mole	Sheep	Bat roost in shed roof
Mink	Squirrel	
Bat roost in pump house	Wood Mouse	

The water level in the lake was quite low, it's coming up to the time of year when the hydrostation does routine checking and maintenance of the pipes that take the water down to the turbines in Maentwrog. Whilst the station manager is targeted to generate as much electricity as possible, and a full reservoir makes the process more efficient, he takes great care to look after the Little Ringed Plovers. In recent years these little birds have started using the shallow end of the lake to build their nests close to the shoreline. The last thing they want in April and May is a sudden rise in water as they incubate their eggs!



There's good walking around the lake, and a bronze-age trackway from Harlech which disappears beneath the water, but cruising on the MV Prysorwen is the most relaxing way to take in the scenery. This 'water bus' used to ply the canals of Amsterdam and was concealed during WWII to keep her out of Nazi hands. She and other boats were driven into a section of canal that was drained and subsequently filled with sand. After Amsterdam the boat saw service on Lake Windermere for many years before being

refurbished and re-christened 'Prysorwen'. For cruising details see [www.traws-sailing.co.uk](http://www.traws-sailing.co.uk)

As we ate our sandwiches the rain clouds gathered and the water level started to rise. One inch of rainfall converts to fifteen inches on the dam wall. Each inch on the dam wall converts to two hours of generation. When the station was first built there was sufficient capacity for most of North Wales but nowadays we have a lot more appliances and the station supplies the areas in and around Porthmadog, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Dolgellau and Harlech. There's enough water to generate for about eight hours every day of the year.

The return journey through the woods and fields to the car park was less fruitful in terms of mammal records as the rain hurried us on. Getting home and switching on the kettle it was comforting to think the rain was powering my cuppa.

## Creature Feature, by Jan Baylis

### Muntjac Deer *Muniacus reevesi*

Whilst working away in Northamptonshire recently, I came across small deer tracks in a field. On nattering to the farmer, he says he regularly sees Muntjac on the farm. A bit curious on my return, I thought I'd find out a bit about these creatures and share it with you. Photo & extracts come largely from [www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk](http://www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk)...many thank yous! (See this site for full article & references). There are at least five species of muntjac in the world, from Pakistan to Java and north to mainland China. Two of these species have been brought to Britain.

The larger Indian muntjac was brought to Woburn Park in about 1900, and isn't thought to have been successful in spreading. The smaller Reeves' muntjac was introduced before 1900 and successfully spread. It does not hybridise with the Indian species.

It is a small deer, reaching about 24" at the shoulder and has a hunch-backed, crouching stance, described as similar to a hare or rabbit in profile. The bucks sport very small single spike antlers from an enlarged pedicle.

As they are subtropical in origin, muntjac do not have a breeding season as such. They produce single fawns every seven months, gestation is 210 days and lactation is six to eight weeks. Pelage (spring and autumn) and, to some extent, antler growth (most adult bucks are in velvet in early summer) have adapted to the British climate. Muntjac are territorial and the social unit is a family group, with young adults being driven off before the arrival of the next fawn. Males make large scrapes and fray on low branches using their tusks, not their antlers. The tusks are the muntjac's primary weapons, showing its primitive ancestry. Both sexes bark like a small dog at intruders then raise their large white tails and run off quickly.



They will live in almost any environment from broad-leaved woodlands, standing crops, railway embankments, to back gardens. Their preferred foods are ivy, bramble, coppice shoots, flowers and seeds of many plants, also fruit, nuts, dead leaves, fungi and market garden produce. They seem primarily animals of dense woodland.

It first appeared in Wales in the late 1970's with the very occasional (and disbelieved) sighting in Monmouthshire and according to the survey, is now present about 15 miles either side of the entire M4 corridor in Wales with other populations in NE Wales and Snowdonia.

Look out for them whilst out & about!

### News from The Mammal Society

The Mammal Society has been busy recently writing its forward plan for the next 6 years. This coincides with the term of office of the Chair. This plan outlines the strategic aims of the Society and also core activities on a year by year basis. One of the most important themes, as far as local mammal groups are concerned, is the setting up of a network of Regional Organisers. There will be two for Wales, one in the South and one in North and

mid-Wales. Sam Dyer has been accepted as the RO for the North, with support from the rest of SMG's steering group. One of the main roles for Sam, as RO, will be to co-ordinate Mammal Society surveys at the local and regional level. This will enable us, and other local groups in Wales, to get involved and contribute more to national surveys. The plans for this year include hedgehog surveys this Spring and small mammal/harvest mouse work in the autumn. There will be support from The Mammal Society office with training and resources. They will also support regional seminars and meetings, give access to publications and provide information where needed. We look forward to taking part in the hedgehog work and will let everyone know what the exact plans are as soon as we do!

The Mammal Society hold an annual conference at Easter and this is an excellent opportunity for all interested in mammals to meet like-minded people and hear about current projects. This year the conference is being held in Winchester on 17<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> April. We will be giving a paper here on the bat project, so any support would be welcomed. There are a lot of other talks that promise to be of interest to us and our activities in North Wales. There are still a few places left, so why not treat yourself? Check out the website for more information - [www.mammal.org.uk](http://www.mammal.org.uk)

If you haven't yet ordered or bought your copy of 'The Handbook of British Mammals' then you can contact the Mammal Society office, order one and pick it up at conference. You can also order the handbook, or any other publication, from the website shop.

### **Reflections of a green consultant - by Dr Rod Gritten**

And I don't mean green as in ecologically green, rather green as in green round the gills. I'm new at this business. I've been an ecologist for more than thirty years and I have recently launched myself out into the world of self-employment and consultancy work.

Can I do an initial bat survey at Nant Gwrtheyrn, just a quick look-see daytime survey to see if there are any bats present in the buildings? No problem. So I quote my usual rate and reckon the job will take about a day to a day and a half, to include both the survey and the write-up, and getting there and back. I usually can knock off three to four houses in a day. The Welsh Language Centre want to do some re-roofing and need a preliminary survey of the roof spaces to see if there are any signs of bat usage. After various exchanges of correspondence and phone calls to arrange plans, ladders, access etc, I duly arrive on site on the first sunny day for almost six weeks. Not just sunny but very warm too. I put on my white one-piece suit, essential to prevent hours of itching from the fibre-glass insulation I'm sure to encounter and make my way up into the loft space of the office. Sure enough, Brown Long-eared bat dung everywhere, characteristic piles of Small Tortoiseshell Butterfly wings and, crammed alongside the ridge beam, scores of bats too.

Well, that was a positive result and after checking in vain from outside for the entrance the bats must be using to gain access to the loft space, I sit down to write up my notes. It's time to have a closer look at the plans the architect has sent me. And it is only now that I realise the full extent of the job I'd thought would only take a short while. Two rows of terraced houses, eleven in one, twelve in the other and the manager's house to inspect as well. Hours later, a very hot sweaty surveyor climbs wearily into his car for the drive home. Twenty six houses, twenty eight loft spaces which is twenty eight climbs up the ladder and down again. Twenty eight pull-ups into the loft spaces, my back and head itching like crazy from the fibre-glass insulation despite the protective suit, my eyes and nose stuffed with cobwebs and clusterfly carcasses and I can't count the number of times I climbed the long ladders to inspect the outsides of the buildings.

And of course there were signs of bats pretty well in every loft space. Just one or two droppings in each house, probably Pipistrelles but exactly how many bats there were lurking under the roofing slates and behind the soffits is anyone's guess. Only a detailed

emergence survey with quite a few helpers will sort that mystery out. Interestingly, there were piles of stoat scats in two of the loft spaces. The noise must have kept folk awake all night.

The moral, of course, is to read the small print not only before making a site visit but ideally before putting in a quote. And the Brown Long-eared roost in the office? Well, actually the office was the only building I'd inspected which wasn't due for re-roofing. The one building I needn't have surveyed!

### **Interesting findings!**

This golden mole was found dead by Tom Hills whilst on holiday in Snowdonia, thank you for the picture!



### **Up and Coming Events**

The guided walks continue in 2009. A full programme for this year is attached to the end of this newsletter, but remember new activities are always being added and e-mails will be sent with details. Any ideas for events or offers to help lead a walk would be most appreciated. Contact Kate to book.

### **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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Jan Baylis: 07817 464853, [jan@cadairidris.wanadoo.co.uk](mailto:jan@cadairidris.wanadoo.co.uk)

Training/Events Programme for 2009

EVENT	DATE	LEADER	
Bat session	Apr 23 <sup>rd</sup>	SMG	evening
Recording walk	Apr 26 <sup>th</sup>	Kate Williamson	daytime
Recording walk	May tbc	Huw Jenkins	daytime
Bat session	May 7 <sup>th</sup>	SMG	evening
Bat session	May 14 <sup>th</sup>	SMG	evening
Bat recording session	May 28 <sup>th</sup>	SMG	evening
*National otter surveys	May 30 <sup>th</sup>	Rob Strachan	daytime
Recording walk	June 6 <sup>th</sup>	Chris Hall	daytime
Botanical Beats and biodiversity event	June 7 <sup>th</sup>	Treborth Botanical Gardens	daytime
Bat session	June 11 <sup>th</sup>	SMG	evening
*Gwydr marten survey	June 20 <sup>th</sup>	Kate Williamson	daytime
Bat session	June 25 <sup>th</sup>	SMG	evening
Bat session	July 9 <sup>th</sup>	SMG	evening
Recording walk	July 19 <sup>th</sup>	Rob Strachan	daytime
Bat session	July 23 <sup>rd</sup>	SMG	evening
*National otter surveys	July 24 <sup>th</sup> - 26 <sup>th</sup>	Rob Strachan	weekend
*Aberhrrnant marten survey	Aug 1 <sup>st</sup>	Kate Williamson	daytime
Bat sessioin	Aug 5 <sup>th</sup>	SMG	evening
Recording walk	Aug 15 <sup>th</sup>	Rob Strachan	daytime
Bat session	Aug 20 <sup>th</sup>	SMG	evening
*Dyfi marten survey	Aug 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Kate Williamson	daytime
Bat session	Sept 3 <sup>rd</sup>	SMG	evening
Recording walk	Sept 5 <sup>th</sup>	Jan Baylis	daytime
Recording walk	Oct 4 <sup>th</sup>	Jan Baylis	daytime
Recording walk	Nov 7 <sup>th</sup>	Chris Hall	daytime
*National otter surveys	Nov 13 <sup>th</sup> - 15 <sup>th</sup>	Rob Strachan	weekend

Further details of all these events will be e-mailed out nearer the time.

\* Events with an asterisk beside them need to be booked in advance. There are limited places on some of the surveys. Please contact Kate on [harlechkate@aol.com](mailto:harlechkate@aol.com) if you are interested in any of these.