

# CYLCHLYTHYR MAMALIAID ERYRI

## SNOWDONIA MAMMAL GROUP NEWSLETTER



**RHIF/NO. 3**

### **Cyflwyniad**

Croeso i'r trydydd rhifyn o'r cylchlythyr Grŵp Mamaliaid Eryri. Mae hi wedi bod yn brysur iawn drosta i haf efo gweithdai, hyfforddiant a chynllunio prosiectau. Gobeithio bod llwyth ohonoch wedi bod yn mwynhau eich hunan yn cofnodi i'r Atlas - dal ymlaen efo gyrru cofnodion i mewn, diolch. Gyrrwch gofnodion at Kate, [kate.williamson@eryri-npa.gov.uk](mailto:kate.williamson@eryri-npa.gov.uk) <<mailto:kate.williamson@eryri-npa.gov.uk>>.

Mi fydd y cyfarfod terfynol am eleni ar nos Fercher, 15fed Tachwedd ym Mhlas Tan y Bwlch. Fydd Johnny Birks, Ymddiriedolaeth Natur Vincent, yn gwneud sgwrs iddynt. Hefyd, mi fydd na thalgrynnu i fyny o'r flwyddyn gyntaf y Grŵp, plws rafft o wobrwyo fel rhan o'r Atlas! Dal ati hi efo'r cofnodion diddorol/anarferol/prin. Warach enillwch wobwr.

### **Introduction**

Welcome to the third edition of the Snowdonia Mammal Group newsletter. It has been a busy summer of workshops, training and project planning, and hopefully many of you will have been valiantly enjoying mammal recording for the Atlas - Please keep sending in your records regularly, thank you! Please send them to Kate at [kate.williamson@eryri-npa.gov.uk](mailto:kate.williamson@eryri-npa.gov.uk)

The final quarterly meeting for the Group is Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> November at Plas Tan y Bwlch, when Johnny Birks (Vincent Wildlife Trust) will give a talk. There will be a round up of the first year of the Group, plus some prize giving as part of the Atlas project (so keep sending in your many/interesting/unusual records for a chance of a prize!!).

### **Dwyrdd Otter Partnership survey**

The last survey weekend in the 'Habitat Connectivity and Season Habitat Use by Riparian Mammals in North West Wales' project is during the last weekend in

September. It will be interesting to see all the results of this three year project coming together.

### Training

In the second week of August a bat training workshop was held at Plas Tan y Bwlch. Chris Hall gave a talk on bat ecology, Pauline Barber (CCW) talked about roosts and habitats, and Rob Strachan described bat sounds and bat detectors. We all then split into groups with detectors and were positioned around the Plas to help identify exactly where bats were emerging from following recent renovation work. It was a rather quiet night on the bat front however, with NUMBERS/SPECIES??? recorded. Many thanks to the speakers and to everyone who took part in the survey that night.

### Polish bats

As part of the last Quarterly Snowdonia Mammal Group meeting, an excellent illustrated talk was given on the 16<sup>th</sup> August by Richard Crompton, on his interesting recent trip to survey bats in a massive bunker network in Poland. Some of the Europe's rarest bat species, including; the Greater Mouse-eared bat (*Myotis myotis*), Barbastelle bat (*Barbastella barbastellus*), Bechstein's bat (*Myotis bechsteini*), Whiskered bat (*Myotis mystacinus*), Natterer's bat (*Myotis nattereri*), Daubenton's bat (*Myotis daubentonii*), brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*), Northern bat (*Eptesicus nilsonii*), Brandt's bat (*Myotis brandtii*), Pond bat (*Myotis dasycneme*), and the Serotine bat (*Eptesicus serotinus*) have been found roosting in the Nietoperek bat reserve in Lubuskie, western Poland. Thank you Richard, and thanks also to everyone for coming.



Nuts gnawed by dormouse

### Mammal surveying - what to look out for in Autumn, by Becky Groves

For many mammals autumn (September, October, November) is all about preparing for winter and for mammal surveyors it's time to start pulling out those fleece jumpers and waterproof coats to get out and look for signs that mammals leave behind in the run up to winter.

This is the best time of year to go out and look for signs of the dormouse. At this time of year the Dormouse is preparing to go into hibernation when the first frosts arrive in October/

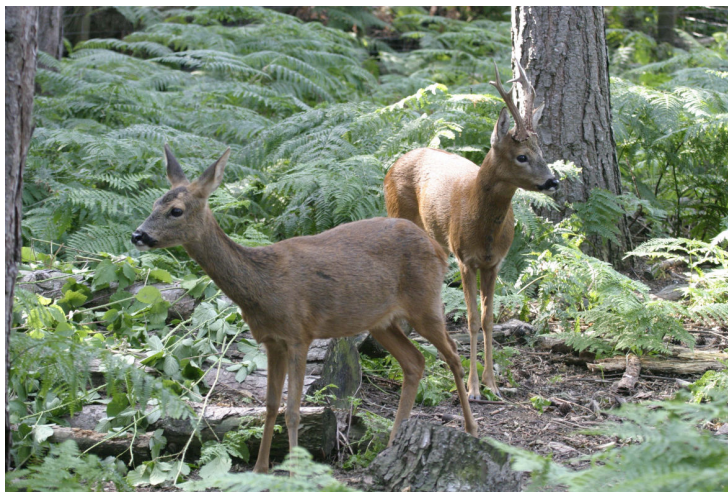
November. The most common and easiest way to look for signs of dormice is to look for hazelnut shells that they have gnawed to get to the nut. Other small mammals also eat hazel nuts, but they all leave different teeth patterns. Dormice carve a virtually smooth inner rim in the hole of the nut and the tooth marks are at an angle to the hole on the nut surface. Woodmice also eat hazelnuts, but they leave parallel tooth-marks on the inner rim and rough marks on the nutshell surface. Bank voles leave neat parallel grooves on the inner rim of the nutshell, but leave no tooth-marks on the shell surface. Squirrels also eat the nuts, but tend to crack the shell in two rather than gnawing a neat hole.

Another way in which you can look out for the presence of dormice in autumn is by looking for their nests. At this time year nests of mammals such as dormice, harvest mice and squirrels become more conspicuous as the leaves fall from the trees. There are three types of nest that the dormouse makes: a summer breeding nest, which is the largest type of nest made from stripped honeysuckle bark, dry grass and leaves; shelter nests are smaller in comparison and are used by individuals to sleep in during the day time and are found up in the trees/



hedges; hibernation nests may be sited in a hollow tree, in a hole under the ground or under a thick carpet of leaves on the ground itself. You may also be more likely to see hedgehogs as they are occupied by preparing hibernation nests in piles of fallen leaves and twigs- remember to check your bonfire for nesting hedgehogs on bonfire night!

There are also some mammals that are mating at this time of year, ready to give birth to young in the spring. Although deer are still not a very common sight in Snowdonia, species such as Roe and Fallow deer are increasing in numbers across Wales. September and October is the time when males of the larger deer species, such as fallow deer are rutting. They compete for the does' attention



Roe Deer pair

by fighting off rivals, scraping the ground with their antlers and repeatedly making a noise described as a 'groaning belch'! For those of you who are a little unsure of your deer species, roe deer are small and slender deer with short antlers and a distinctive white rump. Fallow deer are slightly smaller than Sika deer (larger than roe deer), have a spotted coat, the male has palmate antlers and most distinctively there is a black strip down the tail (which is absent from Sika deer). We need more information about the whereabouts of deer in Snowdonia, so please keep your eyes and ears peeled and keep sending in your records!

### **Otter rescues, by Chris Hall (Afon Dwyryd Otter Partnership)**

In a previous article I mentioned Millie, a young female otter found close to starvation on a shelf in the mill shop (hence the name Millie) at Dinas Mawddwy. Due to a number of reasons including poor advice, Millie ended up in the Welsh Mountain Zoo in Colwyn Bay. She was extremely well looked after and soon returned to peak physical fitness but was hardly ever seen by the visiting public. Although seemingly tame when first picked up as her health improved she reverted to a very wild and nocturnal state. There is now some very good news from the zoo, Millie has now been moved to the Highland Wildlife Park in Kingussie near Aviemore in Scotland where she will be paired up with a frisky young captive male.

Since then, Sarah Jones from the Environment Agency has received two more rescued otters. The first was as a result of a call from a vet on 27<sup>th</sup> April who had been called out to an injured otter in Cwm Pennant. This animal, thought to be about 12 months old was then sent to the wildlife hospital at Stapeley Grange in Cheshire where it was found to be suffering from e coli poisoning. After being nursed back to health it was transferred to the rehabilitation centre in the New Forest where it will be cared for until its eventual re-release which is planned for this coming Autumn. He was christened Bournville by the staff (and is sharing an enclosure with an otter called twix) and is now thriving on a diet of trout, rabbit and mincemeat.



The most recent of Sarah's collection was received on 22<sup>nd</sup> August. A member of the public called to say that she had found an abandoned cub in the village of Sarn Mellteyrn on the Lley peninsular.

PICTURE SARN OTTER  
FROM CHRIS

This time it was a very young cub, only about 12 weeks old. It is likely that it became separated from its mother during recent rapid rises in water levels. At this age it would just be starting to venture out with its mother and probably just wasn't a strong enough swimmer to cope with the current. Luckily it must have been found very soon after getting lost as it is in a very healthy condition as can be seen from the picture and certainly has a healthy appetite, even tackling a trout nearly as big as itself. This animal is also destined for the New Forest where it will join two other cubs rescued in Hampshire at around the same time which are also of a very similar age. Once old enough, this currently nameless cub will also be re-released.

There is some controversy over the re-release of rescued animals. Under current guidance they need to be released as closely as possible to their place of origin. The problem with this policy is that in most cases this means releasing the animals into someone else's territory. This is likely to cause serious conflict with the resident animal and possible fatal injury. There is however no easy solution as most watercourses in Wales are now occupied. One option would be to release the animals in areas of England where the recolonisation by otters is not so extensive and there are large suitable vacant territories. The strategy adopted by the captive bred release programmes which aided the recovery of the population is still relevant in some areas. Another option currently being considered is taking the animals to the Netherlands where there is a lot of water and not many otters. This is likely to be several years away though due to the bureaucracy involved.

### **Are there Harvest Mice near you? By Rob Strachan**

The harvest mouse is Britain's smallest rodent, weighing only 5 - 10g. Its head body length is 50-70mm with a tail almost as long as its body. It is russet-orange in colour with white underparts and easily over-looked!

Its range in the UK extends northwards to Yorkshire but it is thought to be rare in Wales, perhaps restricted only to coastal areas. More surveys are needed to find out the true picture - Is it still present in Snowdonia at all?

Its most favoured habitats are grassland environments with tall dense vegetation, including cereal fields, reedbeds, ditches, roadside embankments, grassy hedgerows, bramble patches and Marram dominated dune slacks. Animals have been found in patches of clear-fell within conifer woods and within coppice woodland but are thought to have arrived there from other habitats.

When and what to look for

The best time to find evidence of harvest mice is during the months of September, October and November when the summer breeding nests are most obvious. These are tennis ball sized nests woven above the ground in a tussock of grass. At this time of the year the vegetation has began to die back revealing the small woven ball up to 50cm above the ground. Often the nests are woven between the taller flower stems of the grass, especially where it has grown through bramble or hawthorn which gives rigidity to the stems so that they do not blow about in the wind.

Grass species	N	%
Cocksfoot	52	42.3
False Oat grass	25	20.3
Reed Canary grass	31	25.2
Tufted hair grass	12	09.8
Other species	3	02.4

The table shows the relative frequency with which nests occur in various grass species from a study carried out in Oxfordshire (own data).

The breeding nests are sturdy structures and may persist in the vegetation well into the winter until heavy rain or snow knocks them down. They are made by the females in late pregnancy and used for one litter only. In the wild each female may have three litters and so builds three nests close to each other (in captivity a female may raise 8 litters in a year).



#### Where to look

Conduct your searches along field margins, road embankments, hedgerows or ditches that have tall grasses (where livestock have not got access) or search rough pasture dominated by tussocks purple moor grass and tufted hair grass. Also, check out marshy ground that has stands of common reed or reed canary grass or coastal dune slacks (including rough areas on golf courses). Patches of clear-fell among conifer plantations may also be worth investigating.

Walk at an ambling pace and keep your eyes peeled for the nests. Once you spot one you can usually quickly find others.

Happy hunting !

Autumn/Winter surveys of tennis-ball sized harvest mice nests

Specific surveys for harvest mice are based on searches for its distinctive summer nest.

### **Pine Martens, red squirrels and a shooting star in Ireland, by Jan Baylis**

While working on waders recently in Ireland, I was lucky enough to come across two mammal species which are somewhat elusive in Wales (to say the least!) - the red squirrel and the pine marten. I was based on the Shannon river, at Banagher, Co. Offaly, the midlands of Ireland. At the southern end of our study area is the town Portumna, at the edge of which is Portumna Forest Park, a 600 hectare park of Scot's pine, larch, Norway spruce, gnarly oaks and beeches, open scrub and grassland areas and lake shore. Colleagues had suggested to go there to try and see squirrels and pine marten. Being fairly early in the season, early April, ground vegetation was low and the leaves on the trees not at full flow, so this should help us theoretically we were told! With heads pointing up into the trees as we walked, looking for either of these animals, and stiff necks starting to kick in, a colleague suddenly said "There!" and on looking to where he was pointing, there they were, two red squirrels almost at ground level on some fallen branches, only about 50m away - fantastic! We watched them feeding on cones for about ten seconds before they clocked us and headed up into the pines. No sign of the pine marten there though unfortunately.

However, about a month later I went with my house mate (and colleague) John who was working on barn owls, to check out a new barn owl site at an old castle that he'd found during the day to see how the owls were using the site. It was a clear night, and we stood in the old courtyard waiting for the owls to appear. At around 10.15pm one flew out of the castle, probably the male (as the female was then heard hissing from inside the castle, and was probably on eggs), flew around the castle above our heads before heading away to hunt. John then wanted to wait to see how long it was before the owl returned with food for its mate. After about 20 minutes we heard rustling in the dense ivy which covered the courtyard and castle walls. A few minutes later John said softly "Pine marten!", and there, silhouetted on the castle wall perfectly, was my first pine marten. I was so chuffed! As it was quite dark now we could see no colouring, but with that size, the ears and tail, John reassured me that it was indeed a pine marten. The source of the rustling in the ivy no doubt! A while later we heard growling and contact calls from behind the castle walls, so more than one marten then, possibly a family? Brilliant! Still waiting for the owl and another chance to see the marten, an amazingly bright shooting star dropped out of the sky behind the castle, so bright it was like a flare going off.

We saw the pine marten again a couple more times, poking its head out from the ivy looking straight at us, then again on the castle wall. John said that he'd found a starling's nest earlier that say in the ivy, right at the point where the marten was seen, so it could well have been raiding the nest. A few days later the den of these pine martens was found nearby in an old derelict farm house, and they did indeed have cubs, three I think. John was regularly putting jam out for them, and I tried to see them again on a couple of occasions but to no avail, and I was very wary about disturbing them so left them alone. A great place though! Other colleagues regularly came across pine martens that season, and the closest I came to one was a road kill unfortunately. Amazing animals, and good additions to my Irish experiences.

### **Species Challenge Fund projects**

Bats - the Group is pleased to have been successful in their bid to secure funding from CCW's Species Challenge Fund. A three year project 'The distribution of local Biodiversity Action Plan priority bat species within Snowdonia's fragmented landscape', starting immediately, is getting underway to do 40 transects of bat recording a year using MP3 players attached to bat detectors. The aim is to boost bat records of as many species as possible with the assistance of this equipment and the analysis of the recordings throughout the Park. We are looking for volunteers to take on one (or more!) transects (1km long) in their area. Training and equipment can be provided. Please contact Chris???

Wolverines - fieldwork is currently underway in the last of a three year project to increase the number of wolverine records in the Park and to link it with potential habitat management work through the Park's biodiversity funding Rhaglen Tir Eryri.

### **The Mammal Society Autumn Symposium**

#### **INVASION ECOLOGY OF MAMMALS**

24-25th November 2006 at The Meeting Rooms, London Zoo

Invasive species pose a considerable threat to biodiversity conservation and the integrity of ecosystems worldwide. This symposium will focus on the impacts on species and ecosystems caused by invasive mammals, and the threats posed to mammal conservation by invasive organisms such as parasites and disease.

The symposium will cover the following themes:  
global issues in invasive species management,



invasive species policy, the ecology and genetics of establishment and spread, invasive disease, invasive mammals as predators and competitors of native species, current and future techniques for management, and future challenges for invasive species ecology and management.

**Speakers and topics include:**

Prof. Mick Clout The invasion ecology of mammals: a global perspective

Dr Huw Thomas Invasive species policy in the UK

Prof. Tony Peacock Invasive species management in Australia

Prof. Jeremy Searle The genetics of mammalian invasions

Dr Glen Saunders Predation impacts of invasive species in Australia

Dr Franck Courchamp Impacts of introduced rodents on islands

Dr Mike Boots Modelling invasive diseases in mammal populations

Dr John Parkes Translating island eradications to mainland New Zealand

Dr Steve Lapidge Novel products for invasive species management in Australia

Prof Dan Simberloff Future challenges in invasive species ecology and management

Anyone who would like to attend this very interesting event should look out for booking details on the Mammal Society

website, [http://www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal/new\\_events.shtml](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal/new_events.shtml)

It is a once in a lifetime opportunity to hear Prof Dan Simberloff speak if nothing else. He was a student of Edward Wilson and worked on the island biogeography theory as a PhD student in the Florida Keys. One of the founding fathers of modern ecology..... (Kate)

**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.