



News & Views

From the Dorset Mammal Group

Website: www.dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk

December 2017

Seasons Greetings

Chairman's Chat

By the time you receive this newsletter it will be winter, a very good time to look for mammals or at least their signs. Tracks can be seen in mud and snow, the lack of foliage helps in spotting deer and, if you are very lucky, foxes and otters. Even hibernating animals sometimes wake up and put in an appearance. It is very useful if sightings of mammals are reported via the Mammal Recording Form on our website, this is especially so in the case of mammals that we would expect to be in hibernation such as hedgehogs. I also urge you to report sightings of badgers or their signs, including road casualties, as this will help us establish the effects of the badger cull which is, sadly, to continue for at least another five years unless common sense prevails.

I would like to thank those members who took part in October's otter, mink and water vole survey and submitted their results. Even negative returns are important and help us build up a picture of the distribution of these mammals and the health of our rivers and streams. I never cease to be surprised at how small a stream an otter will use, there is one in my village that is only two feet across and about six inches deep that is regularly used by the animals as shown by the spraints they regularly leave at strategic points.

One mammal that appears to be on the increase is the polecat so please report any sightings you might have of these

creatures, even road casualties. It can be very difficult to tell whether a sighting is of a polecat or a fitch ferret but report it anyway. The sandy coloured ferrets do not need to be reported. Another animal we are very interested to hear about is the pine marten, there have been anecdotal reports of them being seen and one confirmed sighting but we need more information. There is a population in the New Forest so they are not too far away.

Work is progressing with the compilation of a Dorset mammal atlas which will list all the species of mammals that occur in this county including sea mammals that have been seen from the land along our coast such as dolphins and seals. Here again your sightings are important and will ensure the information is accurate and up to date so please keep sending them in.

I wish you all a very happy Christmas and good luck in the New Year.

Steve Kourik
DMG Chairman

We welcome new members

Jeni Bell, Salisbury

Jackie Riley & Anthony Simmill, Beaminster

Rosemary Arnold & Andrew Washington,
Gillingham

Joanna Constantine, Poole

Wendy Coles, Weymouth



Hedgehog Friendly Dorchester reports on some of their hedgehog activities

At Damers School's old site sustained environmental measures created a wildlife haven adjacent to the hospital and they deservedly won the Eco Green Flag Award for several years running.

The school is continuing to work towards this award at its new Poundbury site and is developing measures to attract wildlife. Inevitably it will take a while for the landscaping to mature and at present there is very little cover for hedgehogs, so Hedgehog Friendly Dorchester donated a hedgehog box [Photo supplied] which has been put under the shepherd's hut where it will be relatively undisturbed. The site abuts the Great Field and despite the barrier created by the security fence it is hoped that hogs will find a safe haven in the school grounds and be able to forage around the Great Field at night.

Meanwhile the old school site and its associated wildlife have been taken over by Dorset County Hospital. Clearly the hospital will need to maximise its use of the site but if conservationists and DCH work together from the outset it should be possible to retain some of the site's wildlife value. The planning process involves ecological impact assessments and mitigation measures. At the hospital's other site, the new radio therapy unit on the Bridport Road, the hospital has committed itself to the provision of three hedgehog boxes and other wildlife measures.

On a Saturday afternoon in August Dorchester had its very first Hedgehog

Extravaganza! The event was organised by Hayley's Hedgehog Rescue, supported by the Dorset Mammal Group and Hedgehog Friendly Dorchester, and took place at Poundbury Garden Centre. The aims were to raise people's awareness of hogs and to raise money for hog conservation. The upstairs room at the garden centre was heaving with people and judging by their feedback they really enjoyed themselves. Over a £1000 was raised for hedgehog conservation in Dorset and the organisers would like to thank everyone for their tremendous enthusiasm and support.

Linda Poulsen

DMG Hedgehog Friendly Dorchester co-ordinator



Photo Linda Poulsen

The hedgehog extravaganza in full swing.

Dorset Mammal Atlas – update November 2017

Sadly, the proposed meeting in October was postponed by Richard who couldn't make it. It was rescheduled for November 20th.

For those not in the know, Richard has moved back to Norfolk and finding the round trip too much has resigned as editor of the atlas. It was a bit of a bombshell and it has thrown things into some disarray. I will discuss the future of the project with the DMG committee at their next meeting and I hope I am able to persuade them that despite this setback, the project is still possible but its form may now be changed to a simpler one. Fortunately it was agreed at the meeting on 20th November we would continue with the project, notwithstanding Richard's leaving the group.

I am still very much in favour of pursuing the project.

Angela Price

Dorset Mammal Atlas Project Coordinator

Our newest hedgehog friendly village reports on their activities. . .

Hazelbury Bryan, has already been busy sending out their first newsletter under the stewardship of Hazel.

Hazel says:

"With the help of the Dorset Mammal Group, Hazelbury Bryan residents are keen to stop the decline in hedgehog numbers, and I am pleased to say that Hazelbury Bryan now has the status of being a 'Hedgehog Friendly Village'!"

"The seven hamlets that make up the village of Hazelbury Bryan are very fortunate to have so many hedgehog visitors to their gardens and their main role as Hedgehog Champions is to help protect their survival, both now and for future generations."



Hedgehogs are an endangered species, so every single one of them is precious. This is why we should be especially careful with bonfires. We need to ensure there are no hedgehogs sheltering or hibernating in the pile of logs, sticks, twigs and leaves which we use to create bonfires.

Bonfire piles are very appealing to sleepy hedgehogs looking for somewhere cosy to hibernate and the longer the pile is left standing, the more chance that hedgehogs will take up residence there.

A great way to avoid harm to hedgehogs is to wait until the day you're planning on having your bonfire before building it. Alternatively, move the bonfire pile to a new site nearby on the night you light it. It is always a good idea for make a final check, using a torch, that nothing has sneaked into the bonfire pile before it is lit.

Food For Hedgehogs

Hedgehogs are omnivorous and in the wild, live on a diet of beetles, larvae, earthworms, caterpillars, millipedes, earwigs and other invertebrates. Slugs usually only make up about 5% of their diet. They will also eat toads, frogs, snails, small mammals, carrion and eggs.

We all love to see hedgehogs in our gardens and we can help to improve their survival rate and encourage them into our space by putting out supplementary food for them, together with a regular supply of fresh water.

The Dorset Mammal Group recommends the following foods:

Dried kitten/cat or dog small kibble biscuits, any variety, including fish, tinned cat or dog food in jelly, including fish, BUT NOT IN GRAVY and any hedgehog specific food e.g. 'Spike', available from Woodrow Feeds and animal food suppliers

New research has shown that meal worms and sunflower hearts are best avoided altogether, or fed only very occasionally in tiny amounts, as it now known that they can cause calcium deficiency in hedgehogs which results in them getting crippling bone disease.

Not on the List: Never feed hedgehogs bread and milk. They cannot digest bread and cow's milk gives them diarrhoea as they are lactose intolerant. Many hedgehogs die as a result of this wrong diet.

Hedgehog Fun Facts

- ★ Although normally solitary creatures, a group of hedgehogs is called an 'ARRAY'.
- ★ A hedgehog has between 5000-7000 spines, each of which lasts about a year.
- ★ Hedgehogs have poor eyesight, but excellent senses of smell and hearing.
- ★ A hedgehog can run over six feet per second.

. . . and finally

A special 'Thank You' goes to Hazelbury Hedgehog Champion - Jeannette Hampstead, who very kindly compiled this first newsletter. Well done and thank you Jeannette!

Hazel Hedley - Hedgehog Friendly Hazelbury Bryan's Co-ordinator

An update from Hedgehog Friendly Portland

Our second meeting in mid September attracted about 35 people, over half of them new to Hedgehog Friendly Portland. At the meeting we discussed practical actions to support hedgehogs and handed round very full and helpful hedgehog packs. As well as Susy and Colin Varndell who led the meeting, we were delighted to welcome Hayley from Hayley's Hedgehog Rescue to answer questions. After the meeting, an information pack was delivered to each of the 30 or so people from the initial meeting in May who were unable to attend this follow-up. We now have a central e-list of 50 people. A smaller group of 24 people have agreed to exchange emails and phone numbers to enable direct contact between them.

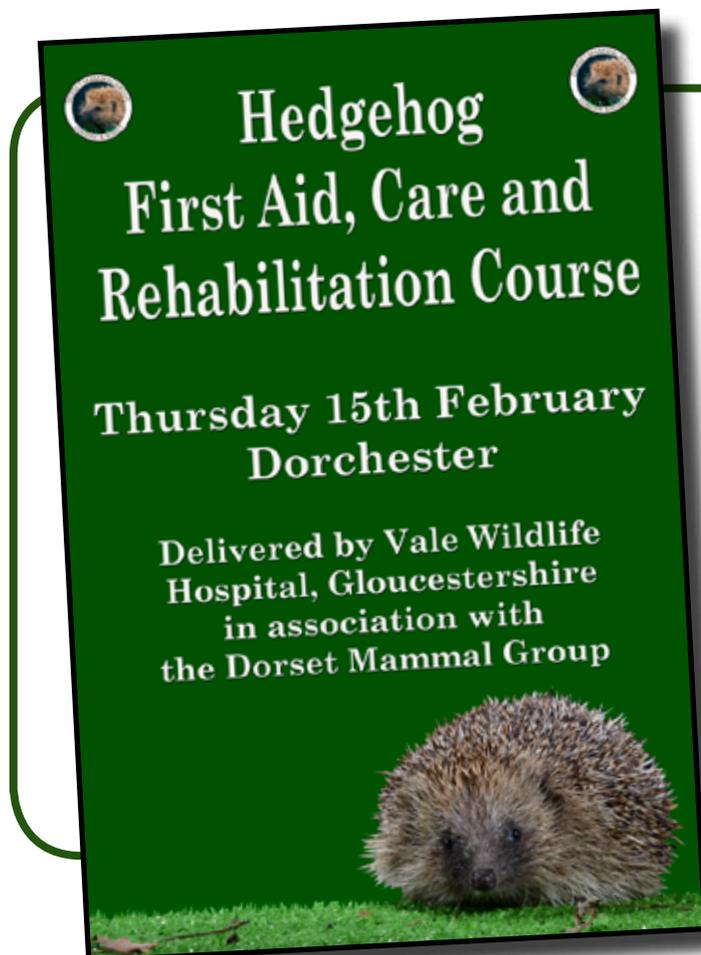
A workshop for children over 5 years old was held at Portland Tophill Library during October half term. Six children attended with a parent. We talked about what hedgehogs look like, what they eat (and looked at hedgehog poo and quills), the kind of places they like, and the nests they build (day, nursery and hibernation). Then everyone made a temporary hedgehog home from a cardboard box covered with a Bag for Life (with ventilation holes), and we talked about how to encourage and look after hedgehogs in the garden. Each child went away with posters about driving slowly and care with

bonfires, and the Wild About Gardens hedgehog booklet. Fi Rogers at the Library is a hedgehog enthusiast and has been a great support to our group. She would like to host another workshop in May next year.

Other pressing concerns have been sites on Portland where planning permission has either been granted for housing or applications are being prepared. In one case, hedge flailing has taken place without consideration for hedgehog cover which one of our members managed to get paused. We understand that housing development is bound to take place, so we are developing relationships with the County Council Ecologist and Natural Environment Team to try to ensure that hedgehog habitats are conserved and protected through Biodiversity Mitigation Plans as much as possible.

*Jo Morland
Hedgehog Friendly Portland co-ordinator*

PS. Visiting the library one Saturday recently, I was hailed by one of the children who had come to the workshop and taken away their own cardboard hedgehog house. She was thrilled that a hedgehog has been using it, and the family is now regularly seeing and feeding a hedgehog in their garden. Success!



If you haven't yet booked your place, don't wait! Places are going fast.

Contact: hedgehogs@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk

Abbi reveals the importance of faecal examinations in diagnosing hedgehog infections



People often ask how we diagnose a sick hedgehog when brought in for treatment, especially as they can be difficult wild animals to treat and their natural defence strategy is to roll into a ball!

Illnesses can be brought on by injuries, infections and stress, and can often be diagnosed from faecal samples. One of the most important ongoing care requirements of a rescue centre is to frequently examine faecal samples under the microscope to look for the many internal parasites (worms) that can compromise a hedgehog's immune system.

Healthy hedgehogs live harmoniously with their internal parasites. It is only when this balance is disrupted that issues become apparent affecting the hedgehog's health. Even with Autumn juveniles too small to survive winter hibernation, by taking them in and over-wintering them, the hog's stress levels often increase whilst in 'captive' tipping the balance in favour of the parasites that would otherwise have not caused a problem.



Adult roundworm full of eggs under the microscope

Parasites, their eggs and larvae are shed intermittently in faeces, meaning that one sample tested may be negative whereas the next may test positive with evidence of parasites. Therefore, for every hedgehog taken in, it is vital that regular faecal samples are tested by a rescue throughout their period in care. It is a relentlessly smelly job!

The most common internal parasites we see at Iford Meadows Hedgehog Rescue include:

- Roundworm (from ingesting earthworms)
- Lungworm (from ingesting slugs and snails)
- Intestinal fluke (from ingesting snails)

This year, we have seen a marked increase in the prevalence of hedgehog intestinal fluke. Symptoms that hogs present will include restlessness, lack of appetite and slimy fatty faeces. If not treated appropriately in time, this can prove fatal.

Conversely, in 2015/6, many of the casualties we treated were admitted with nasal discharge and respiratory issues, indicative of lungworm but additionally accompanied by secondary bacterial infections. Working closely with our expert vet, a number of swabs were taken and sent away to the lab for testing. As a result of the cultures grown, we were able to see a correlating resistance and sensitivity to certain antibiotics in our local patch in Dorset and this research has been invaluable to determine the most effective antibiotic usage for specific types of illness within the rescue, helping to improve treatment success rates and ultimately save more hedgehog lives!

Abbi Miles

Iford Meadows Hedgehog Rescue

www.facebook.com/ifordmeadowshedgehogrescue

Denise reports on what's been happening in Blandford Hedgehog Friendly Town

It's that time of year again when we are thinking of our hedgehogs hibernating but as it's still pretty mild I'm still getting a nightly hedgehog visitor eating dry cat food. I purchased a plastic oblong container and cut a hog-sized hole in one end which I put the food under and weighted it down with a concrete kerbstone to prevent cats getting in.

We had Rob Hammond come in April this year to give his excellent talk on 'Wildlife and the Law' and I urge you to go to any that may come up in the future.

I've also been involved with Ken Hutchinson doing the otter surveys this year which has been interesting and educational. I also attended the Wildlife Otter Trust training day in Barnstaple in August which again was excellent.

In May many of us went to Paignton Zoo for the talk on dormice from Neil who is in charge there, a great day for all who went.

We've also been involved in getting to know our veterinary surgeries here and getting any details they have of hedgehog admissions each month to pass onto DMG. I've given them the details for the Vale Hospital Hedgehog course coming up in Feb 2018 and hope that they will send along at least one person.

We've had several lovely new people join the group over the past year which is fantastic.

We've been busy again this year putting up the 'Slow Down for Me' hedgehog signs along the roads around the area. However, even though we laminate them the

rain seems to take its toll on them and we will shortly remove them and will put up fresh ones around March 2018. One of our group has highlighted that they don't show up at night so a suggestion has been made to Susy that if the words could be printed with just a bold dark outline maybe we could then infill them with some sort of luminous ink/paint – if anyone knows of anything that would do the job and is not too expensive I'd be pleased to hear from you.

The recent talk and slideshow from Colin on 'The Predicament of Hedgehogs' in Bridport recently was fantastic and I am hoping that he will come to Blandford in the New Year to do the same presentation. I feel that this kind of education should go out to as many groups/schools as possible as I believe that education is one of our best avenues to improving the plight of our wildlife and environment.

As usual I prepared quarterly articles for Forum Focus in Blandford but unfortunately the editor couldn't find room for all of them.

Any sightings of hedgehogs or any other mammals can be recorded on the DMG website and we need all of us to do this to get a better understanding of how our wildlife is doing.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a hogtastic New Year.

Denise Montague
Hedgehog Friendly Blandford Co-ordinator

Hayley's Hedgehog Rescue update:

November report:

- 33 admissions since last report (01/09/17-24/11/17)
- 94 admissions (plus many hoglets born on site) this year to date.
- One attacked by youths (since last report). Many have come in too small to hibernate safely – litters are being born very late due to the mild weather.
- Most of the autumn juveniles that have come in have lungworm, other rescues have found this too - a possible explanation is that the colder weather has killed most of their natural food source, so hedgehogs are eating more slugs and snails than normal, which are known to be full of lungworm.

Hayley Dent of Hayley's Hedgehog Rescue

Otter ecology and conservation course

This was run by The Wild Otter Trust on the 12th August near Barnstaple in Devon. Denise and I went from the DMG hoping to learn loads about otters. We did. The format was mainly a power point presentation by Dave Webb, the founder of the WOT and he certainly knows loads about *Lutra lutra* and is someone who helps advise Natural England on otter matters.

We learnt how to recognise signs of otters, tracks, spraints and even their kills – they like slower swimming fish like carp, but having caught a large carp, they only eat the heart and liver and leave the rest, which explains why anglers can become a little exasperated by them. If they're still hungry, they'll catch another and do the same. As carp in private fisheries can be worth thousands, especially the bigger ones, it becomes obvious why conflicts can occur between anglers and conservationists, or between fishery owners and conservationists.

Otters are protected in all stages of their lives, and according to Dave Webb, so is their poo, or spraint as we otter spotters call it. I asked Natural England for confirmation on that and they came back with a definite maybe, but certainly removal of spraints from an area could be construed as interfering with otter social communication.

After lunch we had a visit from a fishery owner who was also a retired marine biologist/ ecologist. His contribution was very good and we discussed the problems of conservation and anglers' rights. He was pro otter but expected not all fishery owners were, and possibly otters would be treated with prejudice by some of them despite their supposed protection. Even a dead otter is protected by law, so you can't dispose of it any old how, or keep bits without a licence (unless it was before the Wildlife and Countryside Act).

After lunch we sat a written test, which we had to pass to get our certificates, and thankfully we all did. As the

group was only six in number, Dave decided we would do the practical part after the test. We went to the River Torridge and he showed us tracks of otter and mink and we then walked along the old railway line which crosses the river in several places and he pointed out several holts along the river. It's where they filmed part of *Tarka the Otter*. Sadly, we didn't see the female otter whose territory that part of the river was, but it was a lovely day and I could just imagine her hunting in the pool by the weir.

The course was free of charge and aimed at informing the general public about otters and any fishermen who want to know about them. We were reminded that otters are apex predators of the river systems, they aren't cuddly things, they have sharp teeth and claws and kill and eat anything they can, including waterfowl and small mammals. They deserve respect from a suitable distance, and our protection. They can be a nuisance to fisheries, and even garden ponds, and there will be conflict of interest with anglers and fisheries, which as mammal specialists we may well become involved in or asked to help resolve. I hope we can, for everyone's sake.

Angela Price



A brief update from the Natural Environment Team - more in the next newsletter

We have been:

- working with Dorset County Farms on a barn owl project;
- working on producing additional guidance notes on our website including hedgehogs;
- carrying out ecological surveys for cycle path routes with sustainable transport team;
- with the countryside ranger team for reinstating bridleways;
- and carrying out phase 1 bat surveys for Dorset Property.

We will report more in the next newsletter.

Alice Quinney
Biodiversity Technical Officer

Badger Update

After a five day extension the 2017 badger culls in Dorset finally finished on Sunday 22nd October. We can only assume that the extension was taken because the cullers did not achieve the required number of animals killed, however, we now wait while the figures are massaged for release. If that last statement sounds cynical, please read on.

For a number of years we have believed that the cullers will take intact road kill and claim that they have shot the animal. This year, not knowing who he was talking to, a culler confirmed that this is exactly what he does. This practice could be seen as either an advantage or a disadvantage for the badger community but remember, the cullers are paid by the carcass and, if true, this action would be fraud.

Furthermore, the culler claimed that he only had to submit a photograph to count an animal as killed. The method of counting dead badgers, and who performs the count, has been a closely guarded secret for a number of years but if this statement is true it would clearly provide yet another area for potential fraud.

It would be well to remember at this stage that many of the cullers are not farmers but people who enjoy killing (eg. the previous mentioned culler), and are paid to do so. In Devon, a senior police officer was "pleased that the increased police presence had resulted in a reduction in rural crime". The senior police officer might do well to consider that the reduced rural crime might not be because of the police presence but because the criminals were kept busy trying to kill badgers.

As ever, BBC reporting of the badger cull showed a definite bias. Local lunchtime news stated that there had been 155 related crimes during the cull (in Devon again), mostly perpetrated by cull protesters against farms. And that was it. The evening news did explain that they were referring to the destruction of badger cages (not farms or farm machinery) but totally failed to mention the 50 year old, female cull protester who was head-butted whilst standing in a lay-by. Interesting that the BBC is moved to mention the destruction of cages by one side but fails to mention violence perpetrated by the other side.

Despite the cull our work with badgers carried on as usual. The badger section of DMG is primarily concerned with education (human not badgers, they know what they're doing), welfare, problems with badgers and science and research, although there are many cross overs between these areas.

Although in recent years much has been learned about badgers most of the information is contained in scientific papers and not readily available to the general public so it is our intention to put together a briefing to correct this oversight.

Hopefully, this will be ready in the Spring.

The welfare of badgers involves trying to mitigate against potential problems (illegal interference with setts, for example) and helping animals in distress. To the latter end we have joined forces with the police, Dorset Badger Vaccination Project and Dorset for Badger and Bovine Welfare (and hope to add Dorset Wildlife Trust) to set up a rescue network across the county which would, of course, benefit any wildlife in distress.

Problems with badgers usually involves the animals digging in people's gardens or under fences and can sometimes be very easily solved. For example, early in the summer we were called to a house because a badger was sleeping under the decking and the owner was worried that it might ultimately cause damage. One look at the garden solved the problem. The lawn was covered with plums and we assured the homeowner that the badger would be gone as soon as the plums were gone. We didn't hear from her again.

Finally, our role in science and research mainly involves the recording and detailed mapping of setts and, regrettably, road traffic accidents, but many questions about badger behaviour (eg. do badgers use bluebells as an insecticide?) and observations by badger watchers across the country may help to provide the answers.

Ian Mortimer
Badger section Leader



Photo Colin Varnell

A welcome contribution from

MARINELife undertake small-boat surveys in Lyme Bay, during which we survey two common cetacean species found in the region, namely white-beaked dolphins and bottlenose dolphins. Individual dolphins are photographed and catalogued, using fin shape and other markings to identify them through future encounters. In tracking the population structure and mobility of these animals, we are helping aid their future conservation, as the data we collect goes towards the establishment of future protected areas. As well as our target species of bottlenose and white-beaked dolphins, we have regularly come across common dolphins during our small-boat surveys.

We also have volunteer surveyors aboard Condor Ferries 'Liberation', which ploughs the outer waters of Lyme Bay as it heads between Dorset and the Channel Islands. During these surveys not only do we often record sightings of bottlenose dolphins, but also of their smaller cousin, the harbour porpoise, which is another inhabitant of Lyme Bay.

Article contributed by Kate of Marine-Life
<http://www.marine-life.org.uk/>



Photo ©Tom Breerton

White-Beaked Dolphin

The Mammal Society Update

It has been a busy few months for the Mammal Society with both staff and office changes to report. Our Information Officer Charlotte Marshall has moved on to start a Master's degree in Biodiversity and Conservation at the University of Exeter. Consequently, we have welcomed Rina Quinlan in to the role, based with the Mammal Society Chair, Prof. Fiona Mathews alongside her new position as Professor of Environmental Biology at the University of Sussex. We are also recruiting for a new Post-doctoral Scientific Officer to join the team and applications are open for this post until 13th December.

We celebrated National Mammal Week in October with events being run around the country and a dedicated social media following using the hash tag #MammalWeek.

At the start of November nearly 100 delegates attended our Autumn Symposium featuring the latest marine mammal research.

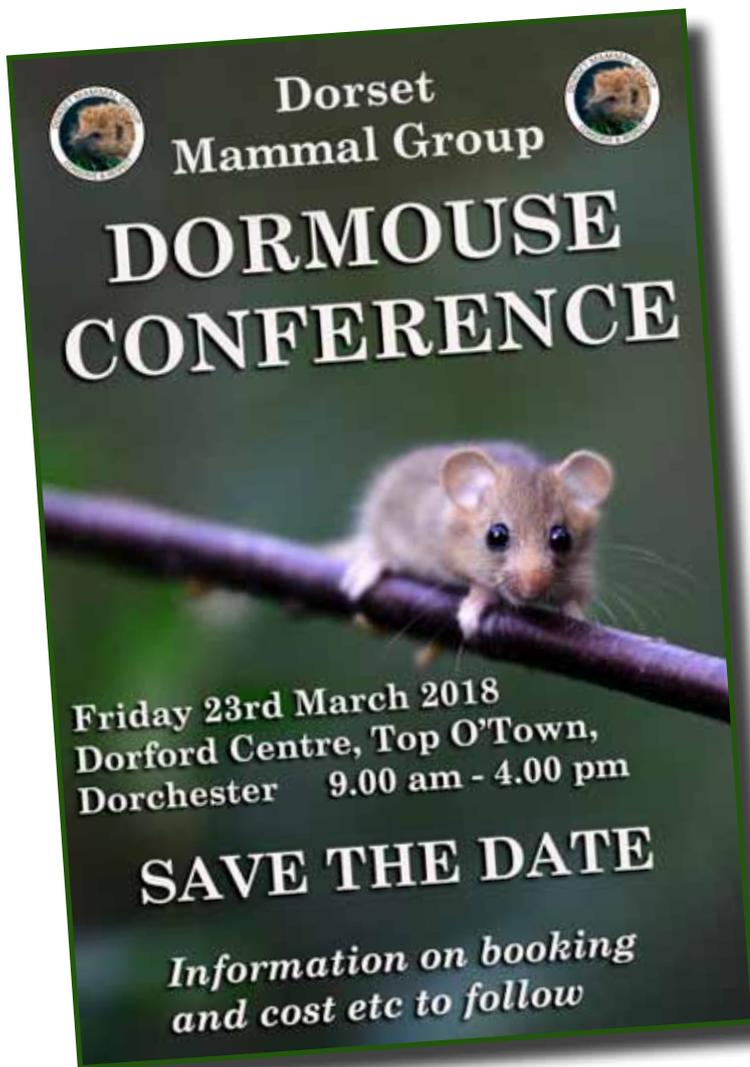
In addition we launched our [2017 Hedgehog Watch Project](#), both online and on the air waves with our Chair, Prof. Fiona Mathews speaking to raise awareness on the importance of this survey on BBC Radio 4's Today programme.

Over the next year, we will be having a particular focus on invasive species, culminating with a scientific symposium and special issue of our journal Mammal Review. A remarkably high proportion of our British mammals are non-native. Many of them, such as rabbits and brown hares, are now generally considered to be part of the British fauna. However, some, such as the grey squirrel, have major conservation implications for native species. We are, therefore, about to launch an awareness-raising campaign about the new mammals that could be entering Britain and Ireland.

For more information on Mammal Society campaigns and membership visit www.mammal.org or follow us on social media.

A flavour of the Dormouse Conference on 23rd March 2018

One of our speakers tells a little bit about his research to tempt you!



Where do dormice hibernate?

The hazel dormice are generally known by their nocturnal habits and arboreal prowess. Most studies on dormouse ecology and behaviour are focused on the active season and little is known about their behaviour in temperate climates during the winter months, apart from the fact that they hibernate.

Hibernation is a special state that the body can undergo, different from sleep, when all vital functions are reduced to a minimum. It is a strategy better suited to relatively predictable climates. During hibernation dormice are reliant on fat reserves built up during the autumn months. It is thought that they use up to 30% of their fat reserves over winter and, consequently, need to weigh at least 12-15g before entering hibernation in order to survive. In Britain, hazel dormice can spend up to six months hibernating from October through to May. During hibernation they are mostly inactive, vulnerable to disturbance and predation. Previous studies indicated that a considerable part of the population does not survive the winter months.

This presentation reflects the preliminary results from an ongoing research on hazel dormouse hibernation, as well as data on hibernation nests and locations collected over a period of 10 years. An insight on methodologies that include search dogs, systematic searches and telemetry are discussed. Also, curiosities such as nest materials, unexpected behaviour, movements and unusual locations for hibernation are presented.

Contributed by Leo Gubert

Dr Kathy Meakin, the Survey and Monitoring Co-ordinator for Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, also reveals a little about what she will be talking about at our Dormouse Conference:

Dormice are not dependent on hazel nuts, but finding hazel nuts eaten by dormice is a valuable record that dormice are persisting in an area of woodland, especially post management such as coppicing.

Collecting hazel nuts from standard timed quadrats of the woodland floor is a simple family survey event open to all which has been used by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust for the past five years as a means of mapping the distribution of dormice within the woods. The survey has been a great success with the public who feel rewarded by helping the Trust to get useful data and the Trust now have some evidence of where in the woods the hazel understorey is a key resource for dormice.



Photographing foxes

– Colin continues to share some of his expertise

Fox photography demands patience, well rehearsed fieldcraft and a thorough knowledge of the animal's behaviour and routines.

Foxes habitually follow well-worn tracks, a narrow path, directly across a field in summer might well be a regularly used fox route to or from cubs. At an active fox den, there will be an overpowering foxy smell, as well as faeces and discarded rabbit skins around the entrances.

Opportunities for fox photography occur throughout the year. During high summer, newly cut haymeadows are magnets for foxes and they will follow the strips of mown grass searching for insects and small mammal casualties.

The opportunist fox will respond to the sound of a rabbit scream. This can be imitated by softly blowing through a piece of grass between thumbs.

In open countryside, foxes live on a diet made up principally of invertebrates, small rodents and rabbits. Wherever rabbits are plentiful foxes will be present.

Foxes will readily come to bait, as they are opportunists, and will not turn their noses up at free food. I purchase cans of economy dog meat and spread this on the ground with a knife. By flicking out tiny morsels of dog meat every few yards, an effective trail of bait could be laid for about 150 yards from one small tin.

To avoid birds taking the bait, it can be buried by lifting the turf with a spade, and then pushing it underneath. As summer progresses, adult foxes tend to visit baiting sites in daytime noticeably less and less. By the time cubs are around eight weeks old they will eagerly come to bait on their own.

Fighting between cubs becomes much more frequent in late summer, offering photo opportunities of wild action. This activity only lasts for a short time though.

The long hours of waiting for foxes in cold and cramped conditions can be uncomfortable and painfully boring, but this is far outweighed by the excitement of a wild fox filling the viewfinder if and when it eventually happens!

Colin Vardell



Photo Colin Vardell

Photo details: Nikon D2X Nikkor 500mm lens ISO 200 f4 @ 1/1000 sec

Information & Intelligence

What is it?

Why is it important?

What is the relevance to Wildlife crime?

They are similar and I use both in all aspects of my police work, I get both from you (the public) as well as finding it out myself or from partner agencies. The fundamental difference being - what is done with it. As you may know wildlife crime and rural crime, which can be linked, is under-reported as such. With no information coming in we are not aware of a problem and as such as a business will focus on other realms. Fortunately our PCC instigated the Rural Crime Team and as such information has steadily come in, this is co-ordinated and allocated out. The information is sifted; where possible linked; and that way – providing we have the resources - turned into positive action.

Sometimes we work with or pass on this info to other bodies such as local authorities, wildlife charities (RSPCA) or deal individually with investigations or by being in the right area at the time and being lucky.

Luck has a lot to do with my line of work – you could be in the right place at the time indicated as potentially correct only to not find anyone/thing. I regularly patrol the River Stour at Blandford, I've engaged with people, and found persons committing crime (ASB/Drugs) and been fortunate enough to see Otters on several occasions. However, recently on leave, I missed the report of someone throwing rocks at one of the otters,

fortunately we, as an organisation, did deal with the situation.

Luck can also go against us and, although not strictly a police job but certainly an amusing encounter, last year I met a badger. I was cycling to work; it was a mild November morning and the badger appeared on a bank, scuttled down into my path sending me sprawling onto the ground; the badger then ran over me!

Please continue to report any wildlife crimes to us on 101, if you see something happening at the time call 999. Know your local WCO and if you do call on a non-urgent basis ask if that officer is on duty. If you are calling us and its safe do try and take pictures of any suspects or vehicles, especially registration numbers. Take pictures of any damage; don't put yourselves in any danger or tamper with any evidence.

Contributed by Rob Hammond Blandford NPT/WCO



Photo Rob Hammond

'WILDLIFE & CRIME'
talk by WCPO Rob Hammond



Friday 26th January 2018
Woodmead Hall, Lyme Regis
7.00 pm

Admission by suggested donation £3.00
DMG members free

Another opportunity to hear Rob and get an insight into his work. These talks are arranged in different locations throughout the county to enable everyone who wants to, to attend at a convenient location.

Next venue is planned to be Wimborne later in 2018.

Otterley obsessed

On the last Saturday in November we tried a new venue – Herrison Hall in Charlton Down – for a talk about otters by Stephen Powles. Having submitted an illustrated article to the Dorset Echo, which was accepted with a promise of publication a week or so beforehand, we were expecting a big turnout and booked the 200-seat Ballroom. Unfortunately, they let us down and didn't publish so the attendance was no more than we have come to expect when advertising mainly to our own members. Around 35 of us (only a minority were DMG members with most coming from Charlton Down itself!) rattled around a bit in the large room but we were enthralled by Stephen's description of his long-term relationship with Hammer Scar (named after a mark on her nose) and his extensive use of CCTV, trail cams and video cameras in following the trials and tribulations of her life as she moves up and down his local river. He has gained her confidence to the point where, whilst filming two of her cubs one year, she was herself engaged in chewing his wellies!

Stephen lives close to the river and has installed cables back to his house from CCTV cameras on the bank. Any action triggers a marker on one of the screens back at the house so he knows exactly what times he needs to check when he comes back in from his work as a vet. If he is there at the time, and he sees an otter is heading upstream, he know how long he has to gear up with camera and lights and get himself to the riverside to record her passing by further up. He has

recruited a friend upstream who also has a riverside property and, by studying the footage collected at both sites, and from many trail cams in between, they can infer all kinds of otter activity (cub-training, breeding times and likely locations, hunting trips). Although Stephen makes a point of saying how much they still don't know, there seemed to be little of the private life of an otter that hadn't been filmed; sprainting, mating and fighting all featured.

Hammer Scar has had cubs several times since being closely monitored. Little is known about what happens to the cubs except that, sooner or later and typically when about a year old, they are driven away to fend for themselves. Indeed, it was apparent that many cubs perished before then, possibly killed by other adult males.

The presentation was a very slick use of the latest Powerpoint with a lot of video running in inserted frames – perhaps alongside a map - and clever editing of multiple inputs to tell a story. I have heard Stephen report on the Hammer Scar project three times now and, each time, the amount of surveillance equipment has increased and so has his insight. It is an extraordinary story and a testament to his determination to learn everything he can about these superb animals.

Mike Lowing



Photos Stephen Powles

Otter & Water Vole Autumn Survey 2017

Twenty eight Surveyors took part in the DMG Autumn survey this year, with numerous sites visited and various observations recorded. Also many of the Surveyors took photographic evidence which was very useful. The terrain was particularly difficult this year as the vegetation had not died back, making access and sightings challenging.

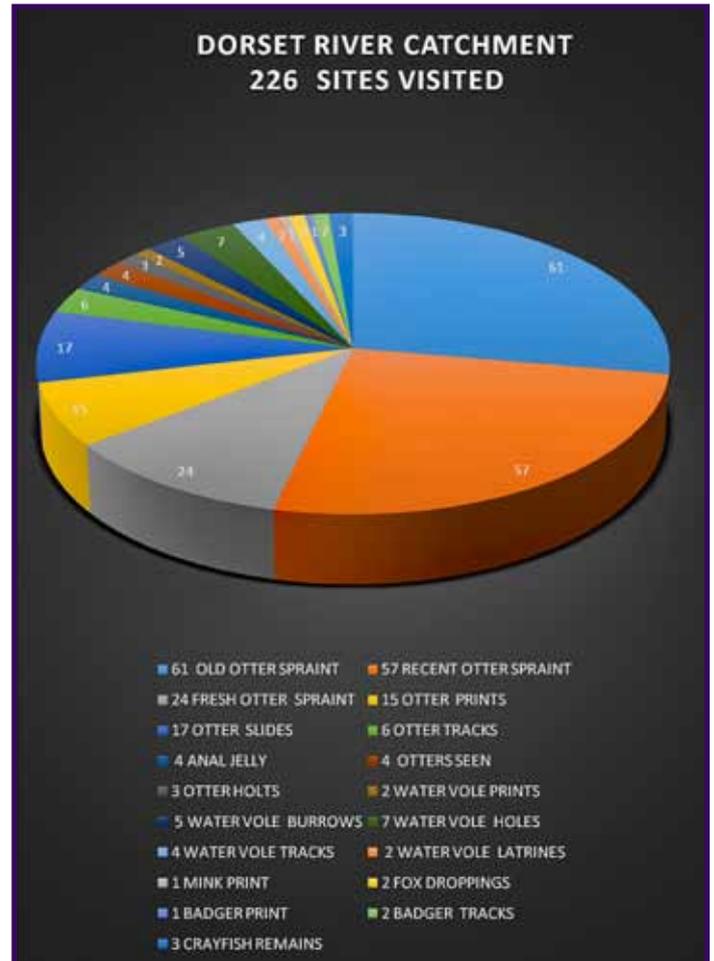
Please see Pie Chart showing all the Surveyors recorded observations.

Unfortunately during one of these surveys an illegal Crayfish trap was discovered, and the surveyor very sensibly and correctly contacted the Environment Agency who came to investigate the situation, very well done. Guidelines will be issued regarding coming across this type of situation and preventing any cross contamination for the Spring survey.

However the areas covering the River Char, River Wey and River Yeo were under attended and more Surveyors are required in these areas when we undertake the Spring survey. If you live in these area catchments and are interested in taking part in the Spring survey 2018, please let me know.

Many thanks to all that took part, all this information would not have been recorded without you, your time and efforts are greatly valued.

Ken Hutchinson
DMG Otter Co-ordinator



Meet Mel

- our new Treasurer

I've had a lifelong passion for wildlife and nature, so the decision to accept the role of Membership Secretary/ Treasurer on the DMG Committee was an easy one.

Growing up on the doorstep of Dewlands Common Nature Reserve it was impossible not to be enthralled by the wildlife and natural beauty that surrounded me.

Although my dream career in wildlife conservation never came to fruition (not so far anyway!), I spend as much time as I can trying to do my bit to support the conservation of our wonderful local wildlife. As well as the DMG, I am also a member of the DWT, RSPB and Butterfly Conservation charities.

With natural habitats being destroyed at an unsustainable rate, I believe we all have a duty to do what we can to support the conservation of our wildlife, before it's too late.

"Be the change that you wish to see in the world."

Mahatma Gandhi

Mel Elliott
Treasurer/Membership Secretary





Dates for your Diary

Please print a copy and stick it on your fridge

Consult the DMG website to see the final details of all the events (as they become available)

Thurs 25th January (tbc)	The Hedgehog Predicament by Colin Varndell - Portland Heights Hotel
Fri 26th January 7:00pm	Wildlife & Crime - Woodmead Hall, Lyme Regis
Thurs 15th February	Hedgehog First Aid, Care & Rehabilitation Course - Dorchester
Sat 17th February 1:00 - 5:00pm	Puddletown Hedgehog Friendly Village - First Meeting
Fri 23rd March 9:00am - 4:00pm	Dormouse Conference - Dorford Centre, Top O'Town, Dorchester
Sat 5th May 9:30am - 1:00pm	Second Hedgehog Meeting - Puddletown

Wanted: Dorset Mammal Group Chairperson from 2018 AGM

No experience necessary, just a desire to work for the benefit of our Dorset mammals.

Steve is waiting to hear from you!

Dorset Mammal Group Committee 2018

Chairperson	Steve Kourik	chair@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk
Treasurer	Mel Elliott	treasurer@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk
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Dorset Mammal Atlas Leader	Angela Price	
Without Portfolio	Jo Morland	

Dorset Mammal Group

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Website: <https://dorsetmammalgroup.wordpress.com/>