



News & Views

From the Dorset Mammal Group

Website: www.dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk

April 2018

Chairman's Chat

People interested in wildlife often make their homes welcoming to the species in which they are interested by providing, for example, nest boxes - sometimes fitted with a camera to observe birds and their chicks; insect houses; nectar producing flowers for bees, hoverflies and butterflies and ponds for frogs, toads, newts and water insects.

But what about mammals, what can be done to encourage them?

Well, boxes are available either for summer roosting or hibernating bats; gardens can be made hedgehog friendly (plenty of advice on this on our website) and you can buy or make nest boxes for Woodmice and Dormice.

However the easiest way is just to manage your garden in a wildlife-friendly way by keeping a corner undisturbed but with a stack of logs, branches and twigs and a native-tree hedgerow is excellent in attracting small mammals.

When I moved into the house where I now live there was a horrible leylandii hedge which I removed and replaced with hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, hornbeam and beech the result is that I now get Common Shrews, Woodmice, Bank Voles and even, once, a Weasel. I am fortunate that I live on the edge of my

village so I also get Foxes and Badgers on a daily, or rather nightly, basis.

If we all do what we can to create habitat for wildlife then we are doing our bit to replace what is being lost by intensive agriculture and development.

It is very important to be careful in the use of pesticides in your garden: slug pellets should be avoided, even so-called animal friendly pellets as these can cause serious problems to many creatures especially hedgehogs, frogs, toads and newts. Insecticides are indiscriminate and kill many of the insects we should welcome into the garden such as bees, butterflies, moths and hoverflies and some herbicides (e.g. glyphosate) are toxic to wild animals.

Not all of us have or indeed want a garden so where can we go to see mammals? The answer, surprisingly, is RSPB reserves. At Arne you can see Sika Deer and, if you are lucky, Water Voles. Whilst at Radipole in Weymouth there is always the chance of seeing an Otter or, perhaps, a Harvest Mouse. In summer Bats can be seen flying over water at both these reserves and at RSPB Lodmoor, though the best way is to join one of the bat walks organised by the Dorset Bat Group.

Now the days are getting warmer and longer mammal watching should get easier and more comfortable.

Steve Kourik

Dual Membership with Mammal Society ceases

We have recently been notified by the Mammal Society that due to the costs of administration, they are withdrawing from the dual membership scheme with local Mammal groups.

Existing dual memberships will be honoured until their expiry on the 1st July.

All members who currently hold dual memberships will be contacted directly over the next few weeks

to provide further details on the changes required.

Dorset Mammal Group will once again be holding membership fees at the current rate for 2018/19, with single membership available from just £8 per year. Full details of membership options can be found on our website.

Mel Elliott
Membership Secretary & Treasurer

Badger Update

April again (how did that happen?), the month when some 50% of badger cubs, now aged approximately 8 weeks, emerge from underground for the first time. March will have seen the first 20% emerge and the remaining 30% will show their faces over the next few months.

Badger litter size in the south west of England is from 1 to 5 cubs with the average being 2.7 to 2.9 (different surveys) yet the most frequent number to emerge is just 2 and a significant number don't survive to make it above ground. This loss is believed to be because some females lose their entire litter. But badger survival problems didn't begin there.

The majority of female badgers mate and conceive in the Spring but some 60% of embryos fail to implant and, of these, a further 35% fail during pregnancy. Then, as mentioned above, only two thirds of cubs survive to emerge above ground and, if that were not bad enough, 56% of cubs will fail to survive their first winter. Taken altogether these losses result in just 8% (some authorities say as low as 3%) of embryos eventually becoming yearling badgers.

Badger numbers are slowly increasing but it is important to understand that they have a hard time producing the next generation and to remember that they are recovering from almost total UK extinction at the beginning of the 20th century. So, spare a thought for



Photo © Collin Varndell

the cubs that emerge in a dry or frozen April, when their main food source for the time of year, the humble earthworm, has disappeared deep into the ground.

Ian Mortimer

PS. I've been away since the end of February and at the time of leaving I still hadn't seen any published results for the number of animals killed in the 3 Dorset cull zones during the 2017 badger culls.

PPS. Dorset Badger Vaccination Project is looking for volunteers to help with this year's vaccination programme. If you are interested in helping and would like further details please email me at badgers@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk

Dorset Mammal Atlas Group

The group has met informally to try and consider the best ways to organise the text element and then how to marry that with the maps while making the whole thing useable by the average member.

Steve, Nick and I met to resolve some of the things regarding the text and who would do which groups of mammals. Then Steve and I met with Mike Lowing, who is still beavering away with the difficult bits, that is setting it up on the internet and creating the links between different elements of the atlas.

We have a meeting with Carolyn and Alison at DERC on the 26th of March to discuss how we further the project, but at this stage we are making reasonable progress.

Remember we need records of sightings of mammals, on the newer maps, ie since 2010, there are quite a few white spaces, even for common mammals, so please when you go out walking or driving take note of any mammals you see, even road kill because they are all submissible as records and when possible do take photos.

I recently looked at two dead polecat ferrets on the Weymouth Road, a stretch of road which seems to turn up these or polecats with some regularity. You can submit records via the link on our website: <https://dorsetmammalgroup.wordpress.com/mammal-recording-form/>

Angela Price

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!

The highly successful dormouse conference in March

The Dorset Mammal Group's dormouse conference in March was an outstanding success. There was a great line-up of speakers who not only shared dormouse information but who also entertained the audience with many amusing anecdotes. Ian White opened the conference with some startling facts about the decline of dormice – 38% since 2000 and around a 5% decrease each year. Many sites where dormice used to live are now devoid of this enigmatic but enchanting species. Some of the serious factors influencing their decline are deer and cats. Deer graze the understorey in woodland, leaving no scrub and shrub species available for dormice. Cats predate dormice, and where development has occurred near to woodland the dormouse population has been annihilated.

Leo Gubert gave an insight into where dormice hibernate. His research was intriguing and dispelled many myths about nest location. Gareth Harris from Wiltshire and Kathy Meakin from Gloucestershire gave insights into how the dormouse population is surviving in those counties. Finally, Amber Rosenthal, from the Dorset Wildlife Trust, rounded off the event with some interesting dormouse information from the DWT reserves and Dorset. Worryingly, dormice have drastically declined in Dorset even though it is meant to be one of the dormouse



Photo © Hayley Dent

Leo Gubert enlightening the audience about where dormice hibernate

strongholds nationally. The event was fully booked and all participants and speakers left with a Dorset Mammal Group mug – a memento from the event.

Alex Morss, who had to pull out at the last minute, will come and give her presentation to the mammal group at a later date.

Susy Varndell

Dormouse survey dates 2018

Dormouse checks 2018 – all at 9.30 unless told otherwise. Only open to DMG members.

Please email dormice@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk if you wish to attend

Sunday 29th April - Thorncombe Wood

Saturday 19th May - Netherbury

Saturday 16th June – Thorncombe Wood

Saturday 21 July – Netherbury

Saturday 18th August – Thorncombe Wood

Saturday 8th September – Providence Farm, Broadwindsor

Saturday 22nd September – Netherbury

Saturday 20th October – Thorncombe

Saturday 17th November – Netherbury

Other sites we may be surveying are at Chaffeys, Radipole and Halstock.

Susy Varndell



The lucky participants who attended the dormouse conference on 23 March all received a small memento from the day – a Dorset Mammal Group mug!

Be a Dormouse Detective for a day!

How about a day in Gloucestershire with friends, with family, helping the Wildlife Trust search for evidence of Dormice? For those who were not able to hear Dr Kathy Meakin's enthusiastic and inspiring presentation at the Conference in Dorchester last month, Dr Meakin is heading up a Research Group in Lower Wood Nature Reserve looking for nibbled hazelnuts as evidence of the presence of dormice.

This audit is a whole new way of conducting research when funding is cut [and how many times have we heard that?]. It was devised by Dr Meakin, and her programme has already played host to parties of interested people who want to get stuck in, including families and school parties. It's easy, no experience is needed, and anyone can join in. You will work in groups and will be shown on the day what you need to do and how to map your finds. This is vital work

to build the body of evidence required to protect the habitats of these delightful creatures, and has wider implications in the possibility of being duplicated elsewhere in the country.

With enough interest we propose to arrange a coach to take a party there and back on an arranged day later this year. If you think this could be for you, with or without friends/kids/grandma etc, please indicate your interest now to diana.maxwell@hotmail.co.uk giving the number of adults and children. At this stage this is just an enquiry as to the likely interested numbers; there is no obligation or any request for money, but of course the more the interest the lower the price.

You will be in the open air on a given section of ground, so will need to wear suitable clothing and footwear for the weather. If there is enough interest, watch this space for more details.

Diana Maxwell



Photo © Colin Varndell

Dormice have declined drastically in Dorset.

Did you know the DMG has a Facebook page?

The current DMG Facebook page has been running since 2016 and is a place where upcoming events are posted, great photos of some of the local wildlife are shared and DMG members can interact.

If you would like to talk to fellow DMG members and share some of your wildlife photos, videos and experiences we'd love you to 'follow' the page.

Please find us at: <https://www.facebook.com/Dorset-Mammal-Group-466914263500079/>

Hedgehogs and Planning

One of Hedgehog Friendly Portland's first actions was to start gathering hedgehog sightings across the Island. The idea was to get a better idea of population numbers and where hedgehogs were living and breeding, and to plot these on the Island map. The sightings were then recorded on Living Record (www.livingrecord.co.uk)* so that they feed into knowledge about hedgehog populations in Dorset and the UK. We continue to record sightings and they are proving immensely useful in ensuring that the rapidly increasing number of new developments are being constructed in a more hedgehog friendly way.

Dorset Local Planning Authorities routinely ask for a Biodiversity Appraisal, accompanied by an approved Biodiversity Mitigation Plan (BMP), to be submitted with a planning application for developments. This applies to all sites of 0.1ha or more or where there are known protected species or important habitats. Ecology professionals producing these Appraisals consult Dorset Environmental Records Centre about species on or near the development site. Hedgehogs have some protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and are listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) as a priority species due to their continued population decline. Therefore records of hedgehog sightings within 1 km of a development site will be included in the DERC report to the consultants.

We are very lucky in Dorset in having an active and sympathetic DCC Natural Environment Team (NET). The NET is one of the statutory consultees for planning applications. They comment on the Biodiversity Appraisal and BMP submitted by developers, and require mitigation for wildlife which might include retaining or planting hedgerows, specific mitigation measures during site clearance and construction, and hedgehog gravel boards in fences so that hogs can travel between gardens

on the finished site. These requirements from NET are legally binding on developers.

Hedgehog Friendly Portland regularly looks at and comments on planning applications, ensuring the Biodiversity Appraisal mentions hedgehog populations that we know are in the area. We discovered the hard way that the records we submitted take several months until they are included in biodiversity reports from DERC. In one case, the ecology consultant was using an older report from DERC and hedgehogs were recorded as absent although we knew they are active and breeding on the site. We sent a letter giving details of our recorded sightings to NET and to the ecology consultant, as well as the Local Planning Authority. As a result NET required extensive mitigation for hedgehogs on that development. Well worth the effort!

DCC has useful information on planning and biodiversity at the links below, and NET has produced a series of advice and guidance notes on different species which will soon include a hedgehog note. <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/biodiversity>

<https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/article/401489/Biodiversity-Appraisal-in-Dorset>

Hedgehog Street has a very useful guidance note on Development Threats to Hedgehogs. Go to www.hedgehogstreet.org and search for 'planning advice'.

*You can record your sightings instead on the Dorset Mammal Group website. All sightings feed into the national records for the UK. <https://dorsetmammalgroup.wordpress.com/mammal-recording-form/>

Jo Morland
Hedgehog Friendly Portland



Mongolian inflatable hedgehog!



Anthea's knitted hedgehogs which sold out at the Vale Hedgehog First Aid, Care and Rehabilitation Course in March.

For sale: Hedgehog box

I have a couple of hedgehog boxes for sale. £15.00 each.



Email hedgehogs@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk if you are interested.



Anthea has been busy again! But this time she has knitted some gorgeous dormice! They sold out at the dormouse conference. Thank you Anthea.

Vale Wildlife Course on Hedgehog First Aid - Dorchester, 15 Feb 2018

Hedgehog first aid is not for the faint hearted, or so you might think. It's not just the prickles that make it tricky or the proliferation of ailments and accidents that hedgehogs face, but also the lack of in-depth research which compromises the ability to share knowledge and develop good practice. As a consequence there is considerable variation in the skills and knowledge necessary to treat poorly hedgehogs, which prompted DMG's Hedgehog Section to invite the Vale Wildlife Hospital near Tewkesbury to run one of their courses in Dorchester.

The Vale Hospital has an impressive track record. The founder, Caroline Gould, has over 32 years experience of handling, treating and rehabilitating wild animals and the hospital deals with up to 1000 hedgehogs a year. Their courses on hedgehog first aid are highly regarded and have gained national recognition as continuing professional development for veterinary nurses and carers. For the first time ever they agreed to run the course away from their base, an ambitious undertaking both for the hospital and the DMG's Hedgehog Section.

The response from carers, veterinary nurses and vets across Dorset was excellent, and with 35 participants the



Participants learning how to administer subcutaneous fluid to hedgehogs

course was oversubscribed. Caroline and Jeff Wood, the Vale's assistant manager, drove down the previous day in torrential rain and flooding but fortunately the dreadful weather eased overnight and everyone was able to get to the venue in Dorchester for an intensive day's tuition.

The morning was largely theoretical and involved a very comprehensive introduction to just about every aspect of

hedgehog care, from legal aspects, risks to humans and insurance, to detailed guidance on how to assess a hedgehog's health as well as identifying possible injuries, and treatment. All the course participants were given an excellent manual, which they were able to follow as Caroline and Jeff were talking, and which provided an invaluable learning aid to complement the course.

The afternoon session involved practical work including microscopic examination of faecal samples and administering fluids, followed by discussion and a gentle form of course evaluation, a light hearted quiz to see what everyone had learnt. Course



Caroline, Vale's founder, with one of the participants.

Contd . . .

Contd . . .

participants were awarded Vale Hospital attendance certificates, which contribute to veterinary nurses' professional development, as well as bolstering people's ego!

Our initial purpose in hosting the Vale course in Dorset was to establish a county wide base line for hedgehog care and to promote good practice. There is now a nucleus of people well qualified to disseminate the Vale's high standards and a network of people who can share their success and failures, their doubts and uncertainties, what works and what doesn't work. The care and treatment of Dorset's hedgehogs has taken a significant step forward, a catalyst for future development, and we would like to thank everyone who made it possible, particularly Caroline and Jeff.

Linda Poulsen
Hedgehog Friendly Dorchester

And a big thank you to Linda and Anthea, from Hedgehog Friendly Dorchester, for helping me to organise this event.

Susy Varndell

Litter Free Dorset

The #LOVEYOURVERGE campaign is about telling you why roadside verges are important and how litter thrown from cars can be a real problem. We hope by doing this there will be a reduction in roadside litter on our Dorset roads.

Roadside verges are important places for wildlife creatures and for flowers. Unfortunately, many of our roadside verges are strewn with litter. Litter that has been thrown out of car windows and ended up on the side of the road. The most common things found include plastic bottles, plastics bags caught in trees, take a way containers and coffee cups.

Why is this a problem?

It doesn't look very nice for locals and visitors

It can be dangerous to wildlife for example plants can be smothers, insects can get trapped in bottles and glass or metal can harm wildlife

It is very expensive and dangerous to clean up

If you would like to help, Spread the word and support the #LOVEYOURVERGE campaign.

For more information head over to – www.litterfreedorset.co.uk

Craig Bowden
Litter Free Coast and Sea Project Assistant

Please 'think hedgehogs' this Spring.

Hedgehogs are now starting to wake up from their long Winter sleep, and so with this in mind please 'think hedgehogs' this Spring.

Tips to keep hedgehogs safe;

- Check first before using a strimmer or mower
- Ensure ponds have sloped sides or ramps allowing wildlife to escape
- Keep netting 30cm off the ground
- Watch out for hedgehogs in the road
- Be careful when turning compost heaps (hedgehogs like to sleep in them)
- Keep drains covered
- Pick up litter
- Supervise dogs when in the garden
- Please do not use slug pellets
- Check before lighting bonfires

Remember, hedgehogs are strictly nocturnal and if they are found out in daylight they will likely need to be rescued. Carefully pick the hedgehog up and place it in a high-sided box or carrier, and then call your nearest hedgehog rescue for advice.

If you would like to support your local hedgehog population, please consider leaving out a dish of water and some meaty cat or dog food for them. Never give hedgehogs bread or milk.

Hayley's Hedgehog Rescue (HHR)





Dorset Mammal Group presents

The Hedgehog Predicament

A talk about hedgehogs, their plight
and what we can do to help them

by Colin Varndell

Friday May 25th 7.00 for 7.30pm

Netherbury Village Hall

Admission £3.00

Refreshments

Hedgehogs move house

The lovely hedgehog carers Jeanette, Barbara and Hazel from Hazelbury Bryan, picked up nine hedgehogs from Toni, one Thursday in March. All the hogs have now settled into their new homes in Hazelbury. Toni, one of our DMG carers, has had to give up her hedgehog hospital due to poor health. At the age of 85 she is eventually giving up the love of her life and retiring! It was clearly a sad time for Toni after all the years she has spent rescuing and caring for hedgehogs. She is such a gracious and lovely lady.

Jeannette and Barbara both very kindly offered the use of their cars for the house moving operation. A really big thank you to the Hazelbury Hedgehog Team.

A very big thank you to Hazelbury Bryan for taking on Toni's hogs at short notice. Toni was so relieved to know they would be well looked after.

Susy Varndell

An update from the otter & water vole section

Otter sightings on the River Stour in East Dorset have been encouraging over the last few months. Also one Water Vole sighting on my patch at Throop.

I would also like to thank those members who have contacted me with their various sightings over the last few months. This includes

- Allan Reese who had an Otter visit him on the stream that flows through his garden at Forston, Dorchester.
- Shelia & Cathy Dyason on their return home one evening saw an Otter near to their house at Alderholt.
- Paul Turton has been watching a new Dog Otter on the River Avon, on a trail cam that he has set up, unfortunately a Mink was also spotted on the camera.

A new kit was born on the Stour and many thanks to Ian Fox for a wonderful capture of a Mother moving her cub.



A new kit was born on the Stour and many thanks to Ian Fox for a wonderful capture of a mother moving her cub.

Also many thanks to Sandie Moors who has taken on the responsibility of reevaluating locally along the River Piddle sites to those we feel are viable.

It would be very helpful if more members took on the responsibility of evaluating their local waterways to help us decide which sites on the Rivers are the most viable to survey in the future. Once again please email otters@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk

Recently I was invited to attend a consultation with the villagers of Martinstown, by the Dorset Wildlife Trust, with regard to proposed Wildlife Habitat improvements on the South Winterbourne waterway in the village.

The local villagers confirmed that they had seen Otters, Water Voles, Hedgehogs, and Hares and were keen to assist the wildlife.

I also manned the DMG stand there displaying our work and ethos, and to answer any questions that were raised by the villagers.

This project is currently ongoing and I will report on any future developments.

To conclude, I have recently prepared and delivered a basic Otter and Water Vole Training Course to my local Stour Valley Wildlife Rangers as they were interested in learning more about these creatures that inhabit the area that they manage and undertake regular surveys. It was attended by six Rangers and another six Rangers have signed up for a future Course.

They have future plans for the Stour Valley Reserve to hopefully create and manage a Water Vole habitat, surveys will be carried out on suitable sites at the Reserve. They have a good selection of Wildlife on the Reserve, recent sightings of Otters, Deer, Hares, Badgers, Bats, Foxes, Hedgehog and one Water Vole.

Subsequently this training course will be available to members interested in expanding their knowledge of these creatures and their habitat. If you wish to attend a course email otters@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk and if there is some interest I will formulate some dates and a venue, which will be added to the Events Calendar on the DMG Website.

Ken Hutchinson

The Dorset Mammal Group Otter & Water Vole Spring Survey 21st April 2018.

I am now in the process of allocating the various survey sites to participating members who have already registered for the Spring 2018 Survey.

Let us hope for suitable weather and plenty of Surveyors taking part across Dorset. Now is the time to register your interest to take part.

Email otters@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk

Study Reveals Decline in Water voles. How can we help?

Charismatic and elusive, water voles are an integral part of the rivers and streams of Britain. However, a recent analysis by the Wildlife Trusts has found that, despite having full legal protection under Section 9 of Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, areas where water voles are found have declined by 30% in the last decade due to predation and habitat destruction.

In Dorset we are very lucky to have a good population of water voles. Nevertheless, you can count yourself very lucky if you see one! As an ecologist for the Environment Agency I have been surveying for water voles for 7 years and only have two sightings to my name.

Despite conservation efforts and reintroductions, water voles are the fastest declining mammal in the UK.

In order to help the voles, river banks need to be managed more sympathetically with measures such as leaving a fringe of waterside vegetation for food, shelter and cover from predators and creating doggy dip specific areas to stop bank erosion. DMG members can help these conservation efforts by surveying for water voles and reporting any sightings.

At this time of year water voles will be becoming more active and waking up from their winter snooze as they lay dormant underground in their nest chambers.

Breeding occurs from March to October, when the population expands rapidly. Breeding female water voles are fiercely territorial and a tell-tale sign of a water vole burrow is the 'lawn' that they create outside due to the limited feeding range necessitated by the extreme dependency of their offspring. Don't confuse a water vole burrow with a rat burrow however; although similar

in size, a rat burrow will be messier with spoil heaps left outside.

If you are water vole spotting, general characteristics are a rounded body, blunt muzzle, short round ears and a short tail. Listen out for a distinctive 'plop' sound which you can hear when they enter the water as this may be your first indication that they are there. If you have a really keen eye you might see their latrines (piles of poo) and feeding stations which are stems of riverside plants chewed at a 45° angle.

Despite declining numbers, water vole distribution is actually increasing due to reintroduction efforts. With more data and concerted conservation efforts, we can help to ensure that the Wind in the Willows 'Ratty' remains a feature of British waterways for many years to come.

Good locations for water vole spotting:

- River Asker, Bridport – behind Morrison's car park, and
- along Jessops Avenue.

Both make for a lovely walk too.



Water Vole

Photo © Rachel Moors

Rachel Moors

A note of thanks to the Newsletter editor

So another newsletter is nearly here again, I know this because the editor has been chasing round the members of the committee to produce something—and quickly. So I then slink off to my computer and write up a piece about the mammal atlas or anything else she's asked me for, check it and send it off, possibly not thinking that someone has to fit it in with all the things other people have sent, in between organising the next place to become hedgehog friendly, and at the end of March a fascinating and hugely successful dormouse conference in Dorchester.

They say if you want something done, give it to a busy person—well, Susy, none of us know how you do it all, plus keeping Colin in line—but you seem to manage, somehow. And like the rest of us, you do it for love—if anything, the DMG costs us money.

Basically, this is just a vote of thanks to Susy for all the work she does for the group, which I offer on behalf of the committee and members. We do appreciate it and we also know how much effort it takes. So thank you from us all. (Now blow your nose and get organising the next...)

*Angela Price
(dormouse counter and general nuisance)*

A warm welcome to these new members since our last newsletter - Linda, Amy, Alexis, Verity, Amelia, Helen, Terence, Emily, and Diana.

Update from DCC's Natural Environment Team

The survey season is kicking off and Lyn and Ali have already been out surveying for nesting birds in hedgerows for the DCC grounds maintenance team. Throughout the winter months Annabel has been surveying for badgers and Nikki has been carrying out surveys and delivering tool box talks to contractors for Dorset Property. Lyn has also been working with the DCC Bridge team assessing hedgerows under The Hedgerow Regulations criteria which also includes protected species such as dormice.

Nikki has been working with Linda Poulsen and Susy Varndell on a hedgehog advice note which is due to be published and on line by the end of March. This includes facts about hedgehog ecology and behaviour, advice on managing land and gardens for hedgehogs and mitigation and enhancement measures for development including barge boards in fences. We are also updating our Dorset

Biodiversity Protocol guidance for ecologists which includes mitigation and enhancement measures for mammals in development.

We have launched the County Farm Barn Owl Project working with tenant farmers on a number of County Council owned farms in North Dorset. We have located suitable locations to install barn owl boxes in buildings and trees this summer with the help of local company Wildlife Windows.

NET have been provided data for a Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) bat mitigation research project and funded a harp trap and lures for Dorset Bat Group research. More details of this to follow later in the year. We are looking forward to attending and speaking at the Dorset Bat Group Conference in April.

Ali Quinney

Rob's update

Has Spring sprung? It's been a busy few weeks for me, mainly in my core role of neighbourhood policing or helping out neighbouring forces (Salisbury). As I write this I'm also preparing to give an input on wildlife crime, the role of a WCO and how it links into our Rural Crime Team to students at Bournemouth University.

Now the weather is clearing up most people will look at cleaning their houses, doing some decorating and for a few, looking to cut corners and save money. This could mean getting a dodgy workman in to take large items or waste away for easy money.

This of course brings the risk of unlicensed or just plain criminal types who are happy to blight our landscape, this is a serious matter, and rightly causes a lot of anguish both in our lovely county but also nationally. Millions are spent cleaning up area's and catching those responsible is not easy.

The Police don't often get involved. We do get reports and these are passed to our partner agencies, sometimes we come across these sites ourselves and check for any obvious links to progress our investigation or to hand on. Some sites appear to be regularly used and abused. Technology to observe these areas is available which means sometimes these despicable rogues are caught. The stuff that is left is often problematic to our environment and animals. Please don't start digging about yourself – there could be asbestos, or matter that could cause sickness or irritation (but you could leave the mother in law at home!).

So if you come across any impromptu tip sites, please call the Dorset Waste Partnership, or the Environment Agency, the former have a great web tool to map the site and gives the ability to upload photos. We have a 'AskNed' website query tool that will also signpost you to the relevant agency. If you are lucky to witness someone fly tipping please ensure you gain the registration number of the offending vehicle to pass on to us or our partner agencies.

Rob Hammond



Blot on the landscape

Photo © Rob Hammond

A big thank you to Rob for the interesting and enlightening talk he gave for us in Lyme Regis in January. Watch out for his next presentation which will be in East Dorset.

News from MARINElife

The south coast has been host to several large visitors over the winter in the form of humpback whales.

In January, a humpback whale was photographed off Chesil Cove, Dorset, which seemed to be dragging an orange lobster pot buoy. The British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) was contacted, but it was getting dark when they arrived on the scene, and they were not able to ascertain the situation. The whale was last seen heading south, but it was not sighted again, and we can only hope it managed to free itself. The humpback's presence caused quite a bit of excitement on social media, and MARINElife's Director of Research Dr. Tom Brereton, was even invited to speak on BBC Radio Solent about it.

Though the Chesil whale caused the biggest stir, it wasn't our only winter guest. At the end of February, a humpback whale was videoed off Towan Headland, Cornwall. Additionally, at the beginning of March,

another whale was filmed from a drone as it swam off Sennen. There was no mistaking those giant white pectoral fins!

Humpbacks seem to be getting sighted off our south coast during the winter quite regularly these days, but more whales in our waters could lead to more entanglements - who could forget the whale which needed rescuing twice during its time off Devon in early 2017? If you ever see a whale in possible distress, please contact the BDMLR.

Where these whales will be spending their summer is still somewhat of a mystery. One humpback that was seen in the Shetland Islands last year was subsequently identified in the Caribbean, so perhaps the whales which have been swimming around our chilly coast, will also be heading off to the tropics.

Kate

Mammal Photography Tip

By using flash as the main light source, it is possible to create a nocturnal effect during daylight. This image of two hedgehogs was taken two hours before sunset on an overcast day. With the aperture set at f8 at 200 ISO the ambient light required a shutter speed of 1/15 sec. By setting the shutter speed at 1/250 sec and introducing two off-camera flashguns at 1/8 power, the ambient light did not expose the background, leaving it dark.

Nikon D300 - Nikkor 70-200mm lens - Two Nikon SB800 Speedlights.

Colin Varndell



Photo © Colin Varndell

Camera Traps

A couple of years ago Mike Lowing and I ran a half-day workshop on choosing and using a camera trap (sometimes known as a trophy cam or trail camera). I thought it might be helpful to run through the various features these camera have in order to help you choose the right one if you are thinking of buying one. The cost of these devices has come down considerably and there are so many to choose from it can be very confusing and difficult to decide which is the one for you. So, to start with I will run through these features and explain the benefits of each and how important they are.

Image Quality

Personally I think this is very important if you ever want to publish or display the video or photographs obtained or, indeed, decipher what you have captured you need a good quality image. For example, if you set your camera up by a river and record an aquatic mammal if the image quality is poor it may not even be possible to tell whether you have recorded a mink or an otter, this actually happened to me though in my case it was a combination of indistinct image and poor illumination. In the case of video I would always use at least 1920 x 1080 resolution and for still photographs at least 12 megapixels but preferably higher.

No-glow Infrared Lights

It is worth spending extra and getting no-glow lights, these are 'black' or true infrared lights that are invisible to human and most animal eyes. The advantage is that the animals you hope to record are not scared off by the lights and the security of the camera is not compromised if you have it set up where it might be seen and interfered with or stolen. If the camera is only going to be used in your garden to record animals not deterred by lights such as hedgehogs then this may not be too much of a concern to you though it could limit your possible further use of the device.

Camouflage

Most but not all camera traps have camouflaged cases which does help disguise them though some are just olive green or brown. I always add a little of my own in the form of self-adhesive camouflage tape which is quite cheap and easy to attach. I have to be honest, sometimes I hide my cameras so well I have difficulties finding them when I return to check them or change the memory cards.

Trigger Time

I think this is one of the most important features, few things are more annoying than checking your memory cards to find either nothing in view or a tip of a tail disappearing out of frame. The absolute maximum acceptable is one second though the shorter the time the better, some manufacturers claim as little as .4 of a second though I am rather sceptical.

IR Illumination

This is the distance the manufacturers state the infrared light from the camera will reach, they always claim more than is really effective but the reach you require will depend on what you want to record, for a hedgehog in your garden three metres would suffice but deer in a field might need 80 metres or even more. Many cameras allow you to vary the strength of the illumination, sometimes from less than two metres up to a maximum of fifty or more.

Modes

Most cameras allow you to take either still photos, videos or a combination of the two, some even allow time-lapse though I have not found a use for that facility. I find taking twenty seconds of video with a lapse of one second before the camera can be triggered again is the most convenient as an animal that remains in frame will trigger the camera again but if it leaves the frame the camera will not run for more than twenty seconds. However, even with this I have, on occasion, had to view over three hundred clips because vegetation waving in the wind has continually tripped the camera.

Field of View

55 degrees is about right but some cameras boast a wide angle lens, this has the disadvantage of making anything in frame appear much smaller. You would have to decide what is best for you. Wide angle is better for close-up work.

Close Focus

A few cameras come with close-up lenses that allow you to focus on small creatures close to the camera, this is very useful if you wanted to set up the camera to record, say, a small mammal such as a dormouse crossing a branch.

Memory Cards

The cost of these has come down so much that I would not bother with anything smaller than 32Mb.

Battery Life

This is not usually a problem as most cameras can be left for several weeks and can record hundreds of clips on one set of batteries.

Night Focus

It is a feature of optics that visible light is focused slightly differently to infrared this means that a camera that takes sharp pictures in normal light will be slightly out of focus in infrared. As far as I am aware none of the manufacturers produce cameras that focus as well at night as they do in daylight, this is something I wish they would address.

The most difficult job you have is going through all the various camera specifications and deciding which best suits the use you are hoping to put it to. Good luck.

Steve Kourik



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)

Fri 13 April	First hedgehog friendly meeting at Wareham
Sat 14th April	The Radipole Parks and Gardens event 11am-3pm
Sat 21 April	Otter & Water Vole Spring Survey
Sun 29 April	Dormouse Survey, Thorncombe Wood 9:30am
Sat 19 May	Dormouse Survey, Netherbury 9:30am
Fri 25 May	The Hedgehog Predicament by Colin Varndell, Netherbury Village Hall 7.00 for 7.30pm
Sat 16 June	Dormouse Survey, Thorncombe Wood 9:30am
Fri 6 July	DMG AGM at the Colliton Club Dorchester 7.00pm
Sat 21 July	Dormouse Survey, Netherbury 9:30am
Sat 18 August	Dormouse Survey, Thorncombe Wood 9:30am
Sat 8 Sept	Dormouse Survey, Providence Farm, Broadwindsor 9:30am
Sat 22 Sept	Dormouse Survey, Netherbury 9:30am
Sat 20th Oct	Dormouse Survey, Thorncombe 9:30am
Sat 17 Nov	Dormouse Survey, Netherbury 9:30am

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