



HEREFORDSHIRE MAMMAL GROUP

WINTER NEWSLETTER

(January to March 2016)

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Winter Events and Winter Talks

JANUARY

Wednesday, 13th January 2016, 19.30

Celebrity Lecture and Raffle

Camera Trapping – Wildlife Kate

www.wildlifekate.co.uk

Fownhope Village Hall HR1 4PG

(6½ miles SE of Hereford on B4224)

£3 members, £5 non-members

Sunday, 17th January 2016, Time TBC

Ast Wood Volunteer Work Party

Volunteers are required to install bat boxes and carry out repairs on existing bat and dormouse boxes. A chance to spend the day helping to conserve and monitor some of Herefordshire's protected species in a beautiful ancient woodland. Baked potatoes and tea will be provided to all volunteers, cooked on an open fire in the wood.

Please contact Dave Smith for details on 07905 849842 or davetreesmith@aol.com

FEBRUARY

Wednesday, 3rd February 2016, 19:30

Pine Marten Re-introduction in Mid Wales - A talk by Lizzie Croose of VWT

Bunch of Carrots Inn, Hampton Bishop,
Hereford, HR1 4JR

£2 members, £4 non-members

MARCH

Thursday, 10th March 2016, 19:30

Bonkers about Blubber; 1000 days of whales and dolphins – Mike Bailey

Bunch of Carrots Inn, Hampton Bishop,
Hereford, HR1 4JR

There will be a small charge for this event

NEW MEMBERS

We would like to welcome the following new member to HMG:

Melinda Crook

MEMBERSHIP

Mike Coleman, Membership Secretary.

We currently have 44 paid up members in HMG and 188 followers on Facebook.

Facebook

HMG also has an active Facebook page where we post all our events past and present.

www.facebook.com/groups/222077991279736/

Membership Renewals

Many thanks for your support over the last 12 months - we hope that you have enjoyed being part of HMG. For those 50 of you that still need to renew your membership, check out the membership page on our website which

provides full details. At £7.50, which includes insurance cover at our events, membership still offers great value. Alternatively, why not consider joining *The Mammal Society* and receive your HMG membership for free?! This deal is also open to present Mammal Society members on renewal. Either way, don't miss the opportunity to re-join our mammal group.

Membership Secretary Vacancy

If anyone, especially a new member, would like to take on the role of Membership Secretary, please contact a member of the committee. This is an important role and our small group relies on membership fees to carry on our important work. Our ambition is to reach 100 members this year.

NEWS IN BRIEF

AGM October 2015

A change in the constitution regarding the official roles of elected officers was agreed: the official role of "Co-ordinator" was renamed as "Chairperson" and the "Bat Co-ordinator" role is no longer an elected committee post. The roles and responsibilities of the committee now fall in line with other mammal groups: namely Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and elected committee members.

The new committee - elected at the October AGM comprises:

Dave Smith – Chairperson
Mike Bailey – Secretary
Mike Coleman – Treasurer
Mike Coleman – Acting Membership Secretary
Denise Foster – Committee Member (Bat Co-ordinator and Newsletter Editor)
David Lee – Committee Member
Joe Allsopp – Committee Member (Mammal Recorder)

Co-opted members include Nick Underhill-Day (Wildlife and Bridges Co-ordinator) and Ann Bowker (Dormouse Co-ordinator)

Mammal Records – Time to Take Action

By the time this newsletter is published it will be 2016 and time is getting on! Already we are planning our spring and summer surveys. This is the time to submit all your 2015 records.

This time last year all the bat records from the HMG projects were completed but currently only 50% of the project updates have been completed. Why is this? We have achieved so much this year and our survey efforts doubled so I am hoping our bat records have also doubled! So far, we have 300 bat records listed for 2015 but we are hoping to reach the 500 mark. Last year we achieved 438 bat records

Incidentally, the total number of bats HMG handled this year was **625** representing **14** of the **15** species previously recorded in Herefordshire (we're still hunting for the elusive *Nathusius' pipistrelle*). In addition we also had a tantalizing suggestion of a new species for the county – the *Alcathoe* bat – but unfortunately it wouldn't oblige us with a dropping and without DNA evidence it has to remain unconfirmed!

Distribution maps will be prepared in early 2016 for all bat species with one map showing historical records up to 2000 and another up to 2015 so that we can see the results of our survey efforts. Please send any personal bat records you may have for 2015 to Denise Foster so that they can be included on the distribution maps.

Bat Care 2015

Joe Allsopp, Lucy Fay and Denise Foster are the active registered bat carers for Herefordshire.

Denise has had 21 bats in care this year, 14 of which were released successfully. The majority of grounded bats just needed some rest and respite and were able to be released. Four bats were injured by cats and one had a urinary infection.

Joe: "2015 was my first full season as a volunteer bat rehabilitator. The Bat Conservation Trust helpline receives calls from members of the public who've found a grounded or injured bat, who then in turn contact the nearest carer who can go to help if they're free. Apart from the

obvious benefits to the bats concerned, rehabilitators also play an equally important role in educating and reassuring the public about these sometimes-misunderstood animals. The carers themselves also gain invaluable experience handling and processing bats before they're hopefully well enough to be released - extremely useful for those ones who are also training for bat licences.



Photo: Pipistrelles in care – pipistrelles like to be together

It's been an interesting year to say the least! Some of the memorable highlights included the whiskered bat found clinging to the inside wall of the busy Hereford Ambulance depot (released successfully the following night), and strangest of all was the lesser horseshoe that a lady found hanging from the ceiling of her porch, which when I turned up turned out to be already decomposing!

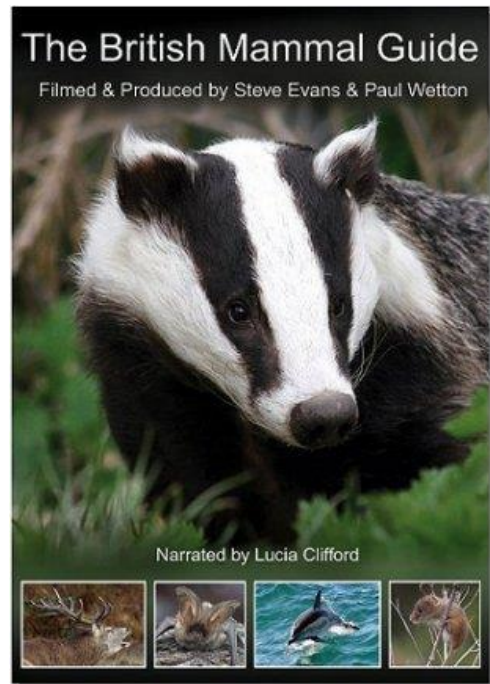


Photo: Cats attacks cause the most damage to bats

Overall I had 17 bats in care this year of which 4 were pups. Five bats were successfully released but sadly nine died or were euthanized. Unfortunately it does illustrate the sad truth

about most rehab. cases and not just mine, particularly involving babies separated from their mothers. Hopefully the outcomes will improve a little as I gain more experience though. Bat rehab is not for the faint-hearted, but when it does pay off, there are few things as rewarding as releasing a bat back into the wild!

The British Mammal Guide – A DVD guide to Mammals of the British Isles
by Steve Evans and Paul Wetton



This is now available to buy at £21.99 from www.britishmammalguide.co.uk

A total of 79 species of mammal found on, or in the waters around, the British Isles and Ireland are featured in this guide. Each species account can be accessed from the main menu and includes a distribution map, helpful identification diagrams plus photos of tracks and signs. The British Mammal Guide is the first and only DVD guide of its kind. This twin disc set features 3 hours of stunning broadcast quality footage of Britain's Whales, Dolphins, Terrestrial Mammals and Bats.

Some HMG members may recall that HMG member Steve Evans joined us in the field on a number of occasions during 2014 and filmed the group during bat and dormouse field sessions. HMG are proud to have been part of this valuable and worthwhile project.

Frith Wood Dormouse Box Scheme

In February this year, 50 dormouse boxes were funded by the Forestry Commission for installing in Frith Wood. At monitoring checks in October and November, both Dormice and their nests were found in a couple of the boxes so this project was well worth the effort.



Photo: Dormouse found at the October box check in Frith Wood

New Wildlife Crime Officer – West Mercia Constabulary

A new wildlife police officer for Herefordshire has been appointed (PC Tom Milton). The committee has suggested that we make contact with Tom and invite him to training events especially regarding protected species.

A Review of the State of British Hedgehogs 2015 – British Hedgehog Preservation Society and PTES

A comprehensive review of the status of British Hedgehogs produced jointly by People's Trust for Endangered Species and the British Hedgehog Preservation Society can be found at:

<http://www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk/?action=viewArticle&articleId=15>

Networking Day – Wigmore Church

HMG was invited to a networking day at Wigmore Village Hall to celebrate the success of a Heritage Lottery Funding application to

transform Wigmore Church into a plush conference centre. This church currently has a maternity colony of Natterer's and possibly brown long-eared bats using the interior of the church, which could affect their future plans.



Photo: Denise showing locals Princess, a captive bat that cannot be released back into the wild.

HMG is providing support to the church and Wigmore is included as part of the new HLF funded *Bats and Swifts Box Installation Project*. Discussions have also taken place with the Wigmore Community Interest Committee to allow bats access to the chancel roof void by providing some special roof tiles. This is currently being considered.

Installation of the boxes will take place in February/March 2016. If you are interested in helping with the project, please contact Denise Foster.

Dormouse Boxes - Experiments with Armour-Plating by Kate Wollen

Queenswood, Dymock Woods has been part of the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme for some years now with 50 boxes in two Forest Nature Reserves within the wood. Boxes are frequently used by birds, dormice, wood mice and yellow-necked mice and occasionally by shrews. One of the areas is alongside the M50, with a number of boxes only about 20 metres from the carriageway. This has never seemed to bother the dormice or other animals that happily use the boxes, although it is rather annoying for those of us that do like the peace that woods can give!

However, what is disturbing to the birds, dormice and other small mammals is the presence of a great spotted woodpecker. As monitors we also find it very disturbing as not only do they disturb the inhabitants but also we keep having to replace the damaged boxes!

The problem with the woodpecker started about 3 years ago when it nested in a Scots pine near to box number 4. There are 4 boxes in the Scots pine coupe (planted 1938) with another 6 boxes across the path on the edge of a Norway spruce plantation, box numbers 4 and 5 being about 20 metres from the woodpecker nest site, box 1 about 80 metres and box 10 about 140 metres away.

Initially only box 4 was pecked, so we removed it. The following year boxes 5 and 6 were damaged so were also removed. This year boxes 3 to 10 were all badly damaged. Interestingly, for the first time ever, box 1 had a dormouse in it! Luckily Mr and Mrs Woodpecker didn't venture this far.



Photo: Kate Wollen

So we decided enough-is-enough! Mammal group member Mike Bradley kindly donated a number of "cut to size" aluminium chequer plates and Barry has just completed the first of 10 'armour-plated' dormouse boxes. The corners of the plates have been filed down to reduce the risk of scratching fingers or ripping the bags when getting the boxes down. Although the box is no heavier than some of the original chunky boxes we used years ago, the next boxes will be slightly smaller. The lids are made of stock board (compressed plastic) and although squirrels do chew this, the woodpecker has never pecked it, so Barry will experiment and make a few pure

stock board boxes with plenty of 'underfloor ventilation' to avoid any condensation that could otherwise occur in a plastic box.

So - next year could be very interesting, seeing how these new designs fare, and making for some interesting monitoring.

One thing for sure, we may have a rather frustrated woodpecker!

All of our boxes are made by ex-Forestry commission employee, Barry Thomas.

Winter Talk Review: Badgers and Foxes – is there a Difference? *a talk by Derek Crawley*



© Paul Cecil www.permuted.org.uk

Derek's talk focussed on the similarities between the lifestyles of both foxes and badgers and despite belonging to different families (the Mustelid family and the dog family) there are similarities between these two groups of mammals.

Foxes are generally nocturnal but they are often seen in the day time. They have excellent night vision for hunting which is due to the large number of rod cells for peripheral vision; rod cells are almost entirely responsible for night vision. As well as a rod cells, they also have a tapetum which reflects light back through the eye and causes the eyes to glow if a light is shone into them at night. Badgers also have night vision and a tapetum but, because they have very small eyes, they do not see particularly well in the dark; they heavily rely on their sense of smell and their strategy for foraging

resembles a “Hoover” action. Foxes have exceptionally good hearing and, coupled with their binocular night vision, they are very efficient hunters.

Foxes and badgers are found in any type of habitat where food is available. Their strategies for foraging and hunting may differ but their habitat is very similar. Most badger setts are found in woodland but they will come out onto grassy areas if they have too.

Badgers live in family groups all year round whereas foxes are generally solitary animals. Foxes normally mate around January time and a female can mate with a number of males and have multiple paternities, which will provide a better genetic balance to her cubs. A dog fox will often support the female and bring food for the family. However, social groups, which are normally headed up by a dominant female, will consist of a non-breeding sister or a female cub from a previous litter and they will provide assistance in rearing the dominant female’s cubs. This is valuable experience which helps them to rear their own litter successfully the following season. The dominant female controls the habitat and the food resource and she will be the main breeder. Cubs are born around mid-March and a litter size can be between 4-8 cubs. In the first few weeks, the vixen will not leave the pups and other females in the social group will bring food back during this time. At 6 weeks the cubs are above ground and other females in the social group will be keeping a watchful eye on the young cubs. Mange can be a problem with foxes and if the vixen contracts mange the other females in the group will provide support and help to feed the young.

Badgers are also controlled by a dominant female – females stay in a clan just like foxes and males will get pushed out. However, badgers live in family groups all year round whereas foxes don’t. Males and females will mate for about 16 hours whereas foxes lock on to each other for about 20 minutes. When badger cubs are born the female will stay with her young while other group members forage and bring back food just like foxes.

The diets of both foxes and badgers are very similar; foxes main prey item is rabbit and in

March, there is plenty of supply. They will also eat small mammals and to catch them they have a characteristic high pounce; they leap and pin their prey with their front paws. This technique is one of the first things cubs learn as they begin to hunt. Foxes, like badgers are also perfectly capable of uncurling hedgehogs and they do this by urinating on the animal to get it to uncurl. Other food resources are worms, berries and insects.

Overall there are many similarities with a few differences but both species are considered to be successful.

Winter Talk Review: Hedgehog Rescue ***a talk by Maureen Williams.***

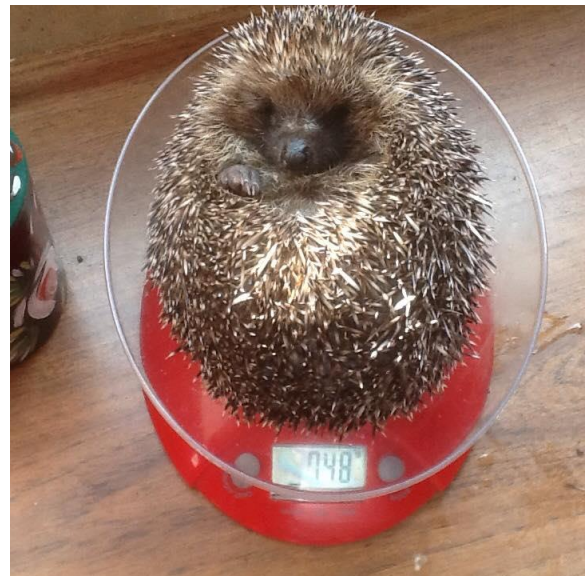


Photo: Maureen Williams

The second of our winter talks was all about the care and rehabilitation of hedgehogs.

Maureen Williams has been caring for wild hedgehogs for ten years now and single-handedly runs *Hollycroft Hedgehog Rescue*, with support from her husband.

It all began one evening when she found a young underweight hedgehog near her home; she took it in and cared for it over the winter, as it was too small to survive on its own. Word soon got around and people began bringing her underweight or ill hedgehogs for her to care for. On top of fatal road casualties, hedgehogs face a

number of threats, including getting tangled in garden netting or plastic drinks can “four-pack” rings and getting their heads stuck in pet food tins. Other hazards are lungworm and simply being too young and small to cope with their first hibernation.

Hedgehogs often have two litters in a year, and it is the young of the second litter who struggle to reach a safe weight for hibernation before the onset of winter. At the time of her talk, in early December, Maureen had 24 hedgehogs in her care the majority of which were underweight juveniles. These animals are over-wintered in Maureen’s converted garage and then released again in the spring. The hedgehogs are returned to where they were rescued, unless the site is deemed unsuitable, in which case they are released elsewhere. People often contact Maureen with a request for hedgehogs for their gardens, and if the garden is well situated away from roads and with a good habitat then Maureen is happy to oblige. The other main problem the rescued hedgehogs come in with is Lungworm. This is carried by slugs and snails, which make up a large part of a hedgehogs diet in the autumn. Thankfully, if hogs are caught in time this can be easily cured with a couple of injections, which Maureen can administer herself.



Photo: Maureen giving this new arrival some basic care and worming treatment

With so many hogs in care it takes between 2½ and 3 hours every morning to feed, water and carry out other essential chores such as weighing. They then have to be fed again in the evening. If there are any orphaned young in her care then they have to be fed throughout the day on special formula milk powder designed for puppies. At the moment Hollycroft is getting

through around nine small tins of Pedigree chum every day mixed with a few meal worms, which seems to be the adults preferred food, although some hogs are fussy and will only eat dried cat biscuits.

This year Maureen has taken in 97 animals since June and all the costs of food and medicines come from donations or out of Maureen’s own pocket.

Dormouse Co-ordinator Update by Ann Bowker

December Dormouse Report

I have been out with Sue Holland and Mike Bailey to collect in the few tubes that were left in Golden Valley, because they might still have been in use. We only seem to have lost one tube out of a total of 200, which is pretty good! I have also been out twice with Kate Wollen on a similar mission.

So that is it for this year and I should like to send a huge vote of thanks to everyone who has helped to make this such a successful surveying year. We also owe a debt of gratitude to those who monitor the boxes in the NDMP every month through rain and shine. It all helps to conserve this lovely species.

I hope that we can find a few more sites to survey in 2016 where dormice have not been reported for a while.

A message to all those who are hoping to train for a dormouse handling licence next year: If you have not already done so, I recommend you download the Dormouse Training Log from the PTES website (remembering to set the printer to 'landscape', which I didn't do first time round). It is a really useful summary of what you need to master and it will be good to keep a diary of your activities in any case.

I hope you have had a wonderful Christmas and wish you all a Happy New Year and I look forward to seeing everyone in 2016.

Bat Co-ordinator Update by Denise Foster

Field activities came to a close at the end of September/early October, due mainly to bat dispersal. However, the hard task of writing up all the results then started and still continues – so far I am only half-way! Reports for all sites are prepared and sent to landowners for their interest and reference - having a report for each site is extremely useful, especially for forward planning for future survey work.

HMG achieved a lot in 2015. A rolling presentation showing all our achievements was left running throughout the AGM. The amount of work we have achieved this year is impressive and even our guest speaker Derek Crawley (Chairman of the Staffordshire Mammal Group and Mammal Society's Co-ordinator for the Nationwide Mammal Atlas) praised our group for the incredible work we do and our engagement with local people.

So, if you want to be part of the group's success, there are lots of exciting projects planned for 2016. In particular, radio-tracking bats back to tree roosts in woodlands managed for timber and the exciting *Bats and Roadside Mammal Transect Surveys*. Even new members with little experience will be able to contribute - as long as you have access to a car! We also have our other ongoing projects including the *Mammal Atlas*, and the *Woodlands and Churches* Projects.

Forestry Commission Bat Awareness Day – Exeter (November 2015)

The second Bat Awareness Training day for Forestry Commission foresters took place in Exeter in November. This training arose from a recommendation put forward as part of the Woodland Bat Project. Denise Foster gave a presentation on the Woodland Bat Project in Herefordshire which was followed by Henry Andrew's training on *Potential Roost Features in Conifer Trees*. It was a very successful day!

The first training day took place in March in the Forest of Dean since which, Kate Wollen, FC Assistant Ecologist and HMG member, reported that she was being contacted much more often about bats and tree roosts.



Photo: Henry Andrews field training on potential roost features

Over 60 FC foresters attended this invaluable training and overall it has been well received by both the foresters themselves and Forestry Commission management.



Photo: A Potential Roost Feature – a hazard beam on a conifer which should be inspected prior to felling.

Radio Tracking Project – 2016 By David Lee

As we reported in the last edition of this newsletter, we have received a large grant from the Woolhope Dome Environmental Trust to fund a radio-tracking study aimed at the identification of natural tree roosts in the area around the Dome.

Target species include brown long-eared and Barbastelle bats and any *Myotis* species caught during trapping sessions, which will commence in early summer 2016.

We will be looking for volunteers to help with the project. Opportunities to take part in radio-

tracking are rare and this is an excellent opportunity for members of HMG to participate in such an exciting advanced field study.

Radio transmitters are now available that weigh less than 0.3 grams so that even our smallest bats can now be tracked by this technique. Transmitters are glued to the backs of bats caught in mist nets and harp traps using a latex-based adhesive designed for use on human skin. The tags are placed between the shoulder blades to prevent them being groomed off and usually remain attached for the life of the transmitter battery – around two weeks for tags of this size – before falling off, causing no distress to the animal.



Photo: Nathusius pipistrelle fitted with radio tag (Cardiff Bat Group)

The tags emit a constant stream of beeps that can be picked up using a specially designed radio receiver, together with a suitable antenna (the technical name for an aerial).



Photo: "Australis" radio-tracking receiver

For direction finding the antenna of choice is a three element Yagi, which is much the same as

an old-fashioned TV or FM radio aerial. The direction towards the bat can be determined by scanning the antenna back and forth to obtain the loudest signal.



Photo: Three-element Yagi tracking antenna

For roost finding during the day we simply walk towards the strongest signal – known as "close approach" until the roost site can be identified. Although in practice things are not generally so straightforward since radio signals tend to be reflected and bounce around the woodland, making life more interesting!

Night-time tracking of active bats to determine foraging areas and tracking flying animals back to roosts is more demanding, with pairs of teams taking simultaneous compass bearings, together with GPS coordinates, in order to locate the flying animals by triangulation.



Photo: Tracking Bechstein's bats in Grafton Wood (Worcestershire)

Inevitably bats sometimes fly off and disappear from the radio so we also have a "whip antenna" with a magnetic base, which can be mounted on

the roof of a car. This antenna is non-directional and allows us rapidly to cover a large area whilst searching for the elusive beep-beep-beep of our bat. Once the signal has been re-acquired it's back to the Yagi and we resume the chase.

Once we have identified a roost the tree will be tagged and the roost protected.

There should be plenty of opportunity to take part in the project. However, whilst we will be able to pre-plan our trapping sessions, everything will depend upon catching suitable bats so we may have to leap into life at short notice! If you would like to take part then please let us know your availability though the summer and whether you are happy to work through the night or just during the day.

Whilst night-time tracking can be more rewarding – daytime roost finding has certain advantages of its own, as you can see in the final photo below!



Photo: Radio-tracking for softees! The advantages of roost-finding during the day!

The Day of the Hedgehog, Telford, 21st November 2015 by Ann Bowker

Set up by The British Hedgehog Preservation Society and PTES, this was a remarkable day, which featured pretty well all the nationally known hedgehog authorities. There were ten speakers in quick succession, which looked rather daunting, but such was the quality that they held our interest and we came out with our heads absolutely buzzing with information. The

whole event was 'facilitated' by **Hugh Warwick** who could not resist giving us the usual jokes:

"Why did the hedgehog cross the road? To look for his flat mate!!" and answers of a similar 'hue' – sorry, 'type'!

The first speaker was, of course, **Dr Pat Morris MBE**, who has been studying hedgehogs since he was a student. The day was dedicated to Dilys Breese and Dr Morris described how she was the producer at the BBC who encouraged him to make his first programme called "*The Great Hedgehog Mystery*", which was a huge success, and she continued to support work on hedgehogs, leaving a legacy when she died that has funded the *Hedgehog Street* project and other research.

Dr Morris gave a potted history of his activities including the problems of early radio tracking, when he had to apply for a licence with only one wavelength available and to report on the conversations he was having with the receiver! This is no longer necessary as one can choose a wavelength, but problems arose when one of his students reported a hedgehog in the branches of a tree. Another student was tracking a red squirrel on the same wavelength! He found out that hedgehogs are not territorial (though they do have a home range) and that they will use each other's nests and food sources without fighting. Nor do they seem to have a homing instinct – if relocated they will explore their new surroundings rather than try to return to their old haunts – a valuable characteristic when they need to be rehomed.



Photo: Denise Foster

Dr Morris is President of the British Hedgehog Preservation Society and says that hedgehog rescue is valuable because they do not have many litters and there are so many threats these days that every animal is worth saving. In the countryside there is more arable farming than in times past resulting in fewer nest sites and nesting material. The use of chemicals to control insects limits the food supply and may poison hedgehogs themselves. Apparently neonicotinoids are lethal to earth worms as well as bees, which makes them doubly dangerous.

Only a few of each litter survive their first hibernation, with late litters particularly threatened.

Pat says youngsters must reach a weight of 450g to hibernate safely. Hedgehog Rescue people say it should be 600g, but his research has shown that although released hedgehogs initially lose weight, they do level out at the weight of the wild population and are perfectly healthy. (Like us, around Christmas, when there is a lot of good food around we tend to put on weight!)

He explained that hedgehog spines have a sort of bulb-shape under the skin and also a bend just above, so that they bounce when they fall without piercing themselves. They can squeeze into or through quite small spaces, but often cannot back out again. Hence the need to avoid leaving plastic litter and netting around and to provide ramps out of ponds and cattle grids.

Henry Johnson is Hedgehog Officer for PTES and works in partnership with BHPS to deliver the Hedgehog Street project that recruits Hedgehog Champions to encourage the provision of small holes in fences to allow hedgehogs to roam freely between gardens, and log piles and a little rough grass to provide cover. There are currently 36,000 of these Champions. He also trains land managers and coordinates the EU Research group for the species. Henry said that since the year 2000 hedgehog numbers in rural areas have declined by half and by about 20% in urban areas. He stressed the importance of collaboration with other NGO's such as the RSPB, NE, the Wildlife Trusts, and so on.

His aims are: to stabilise the population in urban areas; to study fragmentation of rural habitat;

to compile advice for farmers, and increase the numbers of hedgehog champions.

Phil Baker is a lecturer at the University of Reading who has done 20 years of research on mammals. He says that the hedgehog tunnel is a most useful innovation because volunteers cannot give unbiased data. He asked people whether they thought hedgehogs visited their garden and about 33% were found to be incorrect one way or the other, when tunnels were used to check. In the area he studied there were hedgehogs in 32% of the gardens. What we really need is to be able to survey multiple gardens in one district, but this is difficult to arrange.

Becky Walton runs a very successful *Hedgehog Street* in a district of Hove. She had the advantage of having an existing community project into which she could integrate her group. They have regular events and talks and loan tunnels and trail cameras to members. They have not been able to assess overall numbers because the hedgehogs visit several gardens in a night, which is a common difficulty.



Photo: Denise Foster – hedgehog caught feeding on a nightcam

Dr Richard Yarnell from Nottingham Trent University has researched the interactions between hedgehogs and badgers. The two species are reliant on very similar food and of course, badgers are the main predator of hedgehogs. He has definite evidence that when badger numbers go up, hedgehog numbers go down and vice versa. Pat Morris's latest update of his book about Hedgehogs includes a chart of various causes of death and I was surprised to

see that some gamekeepers still destroy them because they eat bird's eggs. We all know about mowers, strimmers and bonfires.

Dr Nigel Reeve described his studies of hedgehogs in Regents Park, which is now the only London Park with a thriving population. Because it is enclosed he has been able to study them in great detail – where they forage, nesting sites, and the size of the population and causes of death.

Carly Pettett talked about the work she has been doing for her PhD with WildCru at Oxford, tracking hedgehogs in agricultural areas of three different counties. She has made particular studies of diet and energetics. Pat Morris gave a more detailed list of what they eat: beetles, millipedes, (not so much centipedes as they bite!), other invertebrates, caterpillars, slugs and worms. He showed a picture of their dentition with the front teeth projecting forwards so that their bite is fairly harmless and they have difficulty managing snails, woodlice or grasshoppers but they do sometimes have a go at bees, earwigs, carrion, frogs and young mice and birds.

Simone Bullion of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust was next to speak. As with dormice, so with hedgehogs, Suffolk seems to be ahead of the game. They have been tracking hedgehogs, initially with flashlights, but now have thermal infrared detectors that show warm areas – in this case the hedgehogs - as pink blobs in a sea of grey. They are much easier to pick out that way and one can follow from a greater distance without disturbing them. In Ipswich they have mapped hedgehogs in public parks and are aiming to ensure and enhance linkage between them. They have also surveyed some rural villages and are aiming to improve hedgerows and encourage grassy field margins to increase connectivity.

Ben Williams has been studying for his PhD at Reading looking at the effects of roads, in particularly where wide highways with concrete barriers down the middle have fragmented populations. He has been looking for genetic variation in the M4 corridor to see if inbreeding is taking place. It is very difficult to work out accurate figures, but he thinks that 50,000

hedgehogs are killed on UK roads every year – about 20% of the population.

He mentioned road kill hotspots and apparently no one has come up with a reason to explain them. Interestingly, Pat Morris (that man again!) argued that hedgehogs would be no better off making a run for it than curling into a ball and that we tend to see dead ones more often because their skin and prickles are so long-lasting and recognisable.

Finally, (phew!) **Simon Thompson** told us about Solihull, which he claims has the first hedgehog improvement zone in the country. He showed maps of the district revealing their efforts to improve connectivity. They are using citizen science to connect gardens and improve the habitat within them, much along the lines of those described by other speakers, but perhaps in a more urban setting with some industrial areas.

Altogether it was a fascinating and inspiring day, very well organised and very good value for money. I came away wondering what HMG can do towards helping these delightful beasts.

One speaker morbidly suggested that they could be extinct in 50 to 60 years. We cannot let that happen! The Wildlife Trust hosted Pat Morris to speak at their AGM and have distributed leaflets about managing gardens for their benefit. How can we contribute? We have heard from a splendid rescue lady, but **where is our Hedgehog Champion?**

Pine Martens back in Wales

By Dave Smith

After years of research and planning, this year the Vincent Wildlife Trust secured permission from Scottish National Heritage to capture wild pine martens and take them down to Wales as part of a new re-introduction scheme. The pine marten (*Martes martes*) was thought to be almost entirely absent from England and Wales by around 1915, with a small stronghold remaining in Scotland. In recent years the Scottish population has been making a good recovery but densities in England and Wales are

thought to be so low that they are virtually extinct.

The first phase of the VWT Pine Marten Recovery Project began earlier this year when trapping of healthy pine martens in Scotland began, with animals taken from stable or expanding populations. Each animal caught was given an extensive health check by a vet, and the healthiest martens were selected and fitted with radio tracking collars before being driven down to a secret location in mid Wales, where they were released.

In total, twenty animals were released this year and the plan is to translocate another twenty next year. The animals were driven down in pairs overnight, with two new animals arriving each week.

I joined David Bavin for a few days half way through this first stage. David works for VWT as their Pine Marten Project Officer and has been working on this project since 2012. Our first task was to furnish two new soft release pens prior to the next pair of animals arriving the following day. These were paid for and constructed by Chester Zoo. Each week a team of volunteers and zoo staff drove down with all the materials and built two new pens. Each pen has a den box attached to one wall and a feeding platform erected in the centre. Dead wood and other brash is then arranged inside to make the martens feel more secure.



Photo: Dave Smith - Freshly furnished pen complete with den box

A second den box is erected outside on a nearby tree.



Photo: Dave Smith - Den box being erected on nearby tree

After we were happy that both pens were ready for the new arrivals, we set about trying to locate the first ten animals that had already been released and were establishing territories in their new location. Most of the martens had begun to settle down and Dave knew roughly where to find them using radio tracking equipment that picks up signals from the collars they were fitted with before leaving Scotland. The location of each marten was estimated by triangulation and marked on a map, and this was repeated at least twice for each animal. Two of the martens had not been tracked for a couple of days and it was believed that they had moved out of the area. One had previously travelled about 25km from its release site before heading back nearer to where it had been originally released. We knocked off at around midnight, as we had to be up at 5am to collect the next two arrivals.

The following morning we met Henry Schofield and Hilary Macmillan, who had just driven down from Scotland with two new healthy pine martens. We drove to the release pens and placed one animal in each pen, still in their travel cages. We quickly and quietly opened the doors to the cages and left them to settle in. New arrivals were left in the pens for six days where they were regularly fed and watered and left to

familiarise themselves with their new surroundings.

After six days, the doors to the pens were left open with food and fresh water left for them each day, until Dave was positive that they were no longer visiting the pens. This was made easier as each pen had two remote trail cameras positioned inside to record any animals coming and going through the door or using the den box inside. That evening we continued with our radio tracking; most of the martens had moved away from their release pens and begun to settle in new areas, but one young female was still returning to her pen each night to pick up the food that Dave was still putting out - this clever animal had also been visiting one of the other empty release pens to collect food left there as well. Once we had established the positions of all the martens we could still find, and marked them on the map, we returned to our beds.

Day three was cold and wet, and we met the crew from Chester Zoo who had driven down the night before and stayed in a nearby B&B. Two new pens were needed for the next pair of martens that were due to arrive the following week. The zoo staff had bought one new pen with them but we needed to dismantle one of the original pens, which was no longer being visited, and re-erect it at a fresh site. It took us all day in the wind and rain to get the two new pens in place and it was just getting dark when we finished.

It was time for me to return home, but now all this year's pine martens have been safely translocated to Wales and Dave and his assistants are still out radio tracking every night.

At some point in the near future all twenty of them will have to be re-captured to have their collars removed again. Once all the radio tracking data has been analysed and they have successfully established their new territories, Dave and his colleagues can then decide on where to release the next twenty in 2016. I hope to return and lend a hand again next year.

HMG CONTACTS

Chairperson - Dave Smith

Email: davetreesmith@aol.co.uk

Secretary – Mike Bailey

Email: mikebailey34@googlemail.com

Treasurer - Mike Coleman

Email: mike.hereford@btinternet.com

Acting Membership Secretary - Mike Coleman

Email: mike.hereford@btinternet.com

Committee Member (Bat Co-ordinator and Newsletter Editor)

Denise Foster

Email: sweetchildofmine@btinternet.com

Committee Member - David Lee

Email: davidlee@thespis.eclipse.co.uk

Committee Member (County Mammal Recorder) Joe Allsopp

Email: hfdmammalrecords@gmail.com

Dormouse Co-ordinator (Co-opted)

Ann Bowker, Email: mike.bowker@clara.net

Wildlife and Bridges Co-ordinator (Co-opted)
Nick Underhill-Day

Email: nunderhillday@gmail.com

HMG Main Email:

Email: hmg2013@btinternet.com