



# HEREFORDSHIRE MAMMAL GROUP

## WINTER/SPRING NEWSLETTER

(January-April 2018)

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### EVENTS

(Events are subject to being updated – please check the website and Facebook regularly)

#### JANUARY 2018

##### Lesser Horseshoe Hibernation Count Limited Numbers

Location: Cannon Frome  
Date: Sun 28<sup>th</sup> Jan, 11.00  
Contact: Dave Smith

#### FEBRUARY 2018

##### Winter talk about The Bats of Trinidad – Denise Foster

Venue: Bunch of Carrots, Hampton Bishop  
Date: Tues 20<sup>th</sup> Feb, 19.30  
*\*Please note new date from previously advertised*

##### Installation of 50 new dormouse boxes 2 or 3 Volunteers needed

Venue: Lea & Paget's Wood  
Date: Thurs 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb – Time TBC  
Contact: Denise Foster

##### Water Shrew Survey – Dave Smith

Venue: Tuck Mill  
Date: Feb – Date TBC  
Contact Dave Smith

#### MARCH 2018

##### Three Boys Out in the Bush – Mammal Spotting in Botswana, Namibia and Zambia – Dr Johnny Birks

Date: Weds 14<sup>th</sup> March, 19.30

*\*Please note new date from previously advertised*

Venue: Bunch of Carrots, Hampton Bishop  
Contact Leigh Russell

#### APRIL 2018

Coming Soon

### MEMBERSHIP

#### Mike Coleman & Leigh Russell Membership

We currently have 53 paid up members in HMG for the 2017/2018 season and 262 followers on Facebook.

During the AGM in October it was agreed by all members that the annual subscription for 2017/18 will be as follows:

£8 - Individual annual subscription

£12 – The new annual family subscription

Facebook - HMG has an active Facebook page where we post all our events past and present:  
[www.facebook.com/groups/222077991279736](http://www.facebook.com/groups/222077991279736)

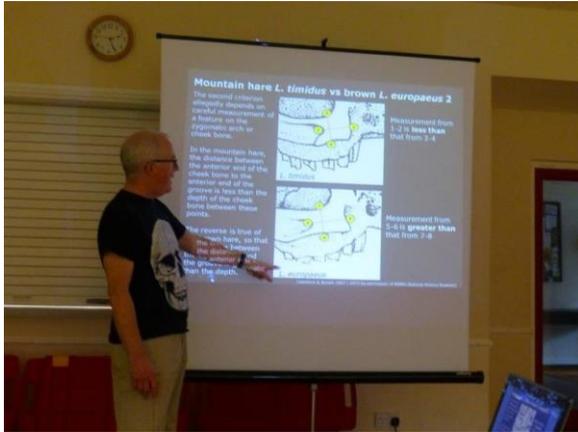
### NEW MEMBERS

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

Jasmina Ashcroft  
Helen Franks  
Claire Hall  
Ian & Beth Hempshall  
Beth Jasper  
Scott Marshall  
Wendy Rushdon  
Steve Wadley  
Jordan Whitcombe  
Camilla Winder

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Mammal Bone ID Workshop with Ric Morris – Nov 2017



The winter season kicked off with a wonderful Bone ID workshop hosted by Ric Morris. The workshop “sold” out very quickly and received great feedback which included “*I found the day extremely interesting, especially as the slides shown and the bones and skeletons exhibited covered such a wide range of mammals, both wild and domesticated, and a few birds*” and “*We were given a fantastic introduction to mammal skeletons and key diagnostic ID features, from small mammals to rabbits, hares,stoats, weasels, polecats, pine martens, badgers, foxes, cats, dogs, deer, sheep, seals and dolphins, to name a few! We practised re-constructing skeleton jigsaws of a cat, a human and a fallow deer skeletons. All accompanied by Ric’s infectious enthusiasm and encyclopaedic knowledge of mammal bones. We look forward to his new book being published soon!*”



If you are interested in purchasing Ric’s book you can contact him via twitter @Skull\_Bloke

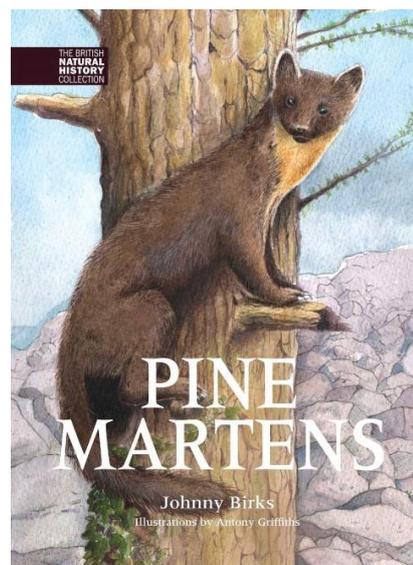
## HMG Members Social – Dec 2017

Eleven members dusted off their bowling shoes in December to join the first HMG Christmas social at MFA Bowl. Everyone had a really fun evening, lots of pre-Christmas calories and some high scores were achieved! More social meeting coming in 2018 so keep your eyes on Facebook and members emails.



## New Whittet Mammal Books

Johnny Birks’ latest book: **Pine Martens** has recently been published as No 8 in the Whittet Books *British Natural History Collection*. Bang up-to-date, including the recent VWT introductions in South Wales and great colour photos by Terry Whittaker, this is an excellent read and is highly recommended.



Whittet has also produced new illustrated editions of Phil Richardson’s **Bats** and Michael Clark’s **Badgers** as part of the same series.

## Adventures in North America - a talk by Lizzie Croose

Our first winter talk of 2018 was given by Lizzie Croose, Mustelid Conservation Officer of the Vincent Wildlife Trust. Lizzie has been involved in a variety of mustelid programmes, such as the National Polecat Survey and the most recent Pine Marten Recovery Project. However, in 2016 Lizzie wanted a change and took extended leave from the VWT to work in Michigan on a Predator- Prey Research Project looking at the survival of white-tailed deer (does and fawn) during the winter months.

The Michigan Predator-Prey Project is a 9 year study, led by Mississippi State University and Michigan Department of Natural Resources, who are investigating the roles of predators, winter weather and habitat on white-tailed deer survival in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

White-tailed deer populations are affected by many factors, including food availability, disease, predation, weather and hunting, so understanding how these factors influence deer numbers is important for informing their effective management.

The main challenge that Lizzie faced during her trip was working in severe weather conditions such as heavy snow, poor road conditions and plummeting temperatures (dropping from 0°C down to minus 20°C). There were also cultural differences, particularly regarding hunting large mammals, something we generally feel uncomfortable with in the UK. Also, some of the standard research practices like tooth extraction for aging purposes were not for the faint-hearted.

White-tailed deer are common, widespread and important ecologically, socially and economically (hunters like to shoot them) in the USA. The hunting harvest of white-tailed deer can generate around \$1 billion each year in Michigan.



**Photo: White-tailed deer with a radio collar fitted (photo credit Lizzie Croose)**

The hunting community was eager to find out what actually kills white-tailed deer (does and fawns) during the winter months, with the suggestion that the main predators are wolves and bears. However, there are four suspects in total; Coyote, Bobcat, Wolf and Black Bear.

The study requires white-tailed deer to be trapped so that radio collars can be fitted. The deer are lured into clover traps, which are basically large box traps that are baited with corn. Once the animal is inside the trap, it is immobilised and its head covered then it is placed on a sleeping bag so it does not get too cold. Biometrics are taken and ear tags fitted. An ultrasound scan is carried out to determine pregnancy and a single tooth is removed for aging purposes (this is standard procedure for research in the US). The deer is finally fitted with a radio collar and also a vaginal implant transmitter if it is pregnant. When the fawn is born the transmitter is expelled, which alerts researchers to find the fawn and subsequently fit it with a radio collar. This is necessary as many fawns are killed in the first few weeks of their life. If the doe dies wearing a radio collar, then the collar transmits a mortality signal so researchers can locate the dead animal in order to determine cause of death.

Part of the research requires black bears to be trapped during the summer months so they can be fitted with radio collars and tracked. Bears are caught using barrel traps with doughnuts as lures. However as with all trapping, non-target species are often found inside these traps. With a passion for doughnuts, the American marten was a common species often found inside these large traps. One particular marten would keep

returning for the doughnuts and continually be caught in the same trap, so researchers had to relocate the trap! Bears are radio-tracked using a light aircraft as tracing these large animals on foot can be very challenging. When the bears are located, stored GPS data can be downloaded from their collars.



**Photo: Lizzie Croose with an immobilised black bear. This bear weighed 58 kg (128lbs) but the average weight for black bears is between 200 and 300 lbs.**

During the winter months, bear dens are very well concealed so it is easy to walk past one without actually knowing it is there. However, when a den is located it is the role of the researcher to crawl inside and anaesthetise the bear. The bear is then brought out of the den and placed on a warm, dry sleeping bag, so as not to compromise the animal in any way. Bear cubs are not able to thermo-regulate so if one is present, it has to be kept warm whilst researchers take measurements and samples from the mother – this is done by placing it inside somebody's coat. If there isn't a cub present the female is checked to determine pregnancy status. Bears give birth in December/January, during the hibernation period, and will wake up to give birth, after which they go back to sleep. The cub will suckle whilst the female is sleeping.

Bobcats were also tracked down, initially using hair snares and wildlife cameras. The hair snare is a loop of wire containing barbs that is held together with a paperclip so the animal cannot be injured. The animal has to go through the hair snare to reach a deer carcass, which is used as bait.

If there is evidence of bobcat from the hair snare and camera footage, large traps are set to

capture the animals and; any caught are fitted with radio-collars. Unfortunately, no bobcats were caught in the traps during Lizzie's visit, just a variety of non-target species such as raccoons, skunks, martens and snowshoe hares.

A total of 18,000 camera images has been taken during the project, which include American martens, Fishers (a member of the marten family but 3 times the size of a marten), bobcats, racoons, skunks, short-tailed weasels and the long-tailed weasel in ermine.

This project has so far had some successful results:

- Predation is the leading cause of fatality for both doe and fawn
- Coyotes then wolves are the biggest predators of adult females
- Vegetation has a big impact on predation; predation is reduced in denser vegetation and vice versa
- Bobcats and Coyotes are the main cause of fawn mortality
- Fawn mortality increases in severe winters
- Wolves and bears are not big predators of does and fawns, as has been suggested by the hunting lobby.

Even though the raccoon was an exciting find for Lizzie, it is generally not liked by the American people. Racoons are highly intelligent and curious creatures, they are excellent climbers and extremely dextrous. However, they can be destructive, particularly in towns and villages. They can cause havoc by raiding dustbins and bird feeders, damaging crops and gardens, opening doors and window latches and opening bottles and jars. They are hard to outsmart and can often outwit people!

Lizzie was lucky enough to encounter many different mammals, and birds like the American bald eagle, during her visit. It was easy to find tracks and signs in the heavy snow, one of which was the recent tracks of a pack of wolves! Despite Lizzie and the team following the tracks, the wolves were just too shy to be spotted.

## Bat Co-ordinator Update by Denise Foster

### Bats and Swift in Churches Project

Monitoring of bat and swift boxes commenced at 11 churches in October 2017 and evidence of bat usage was observed, particularly in boxes that were installed inside towers. Overall 7 out of 11 churches have seen evidence of bats using boxes. However, evidence of swift usage of boxes has only been observed at 1 out of 9 churches, but swifts have continued to use crevices in church buildings. Both bat and swift boxes have been used by other species such as house sparrows, blue and great tits and wood mice.



Photo: Soprano pipistrelles in a bat box at Weston Beggard Church. Another box revealed 4 common pipistrelles.

In 2017, HMG partnered with the Herefordshire Ornithological Club (HOC) to extend the coverage of swift surveys in Herefordshire churches. A total of 18 HOC members carried out 71 swift surveys bringing the overall total of churches surveyed for swifts to 132.

A total of 37 bat surveys were carried out in 2017, bringing the overall total to 112 churches surveyed for bats. Since 2014, 12 Natural

England Volunteer Bat Roost Visits (VBRV) have been carried out; each visit saving the church between £500 and £1000 + VAT (based on Architects' estimates).

The *National Bats in Churches* Heritage lottery Fund bid, submitted by the Natural England/Bat Conservation Trust partnership was successful in 2017 following rejection in 2015. The national project will target 100 churches worst affected by the presence of large numbers of bats. Two Herefordshire churches, Wellington and Pembridge, have been included in the national project. Initial surveys, carried out by professional consultants, have already been performed.

### Natural England Roost Visitor Service

The Natural England free bat advice service, which is instrumental to the success of HMG's Bats and Swifts in Church Project, is currently under review due to financial cuts from Central Government. The Bat Advice Service, administered by the Bat Conservation Trust, currently costs over £500,000 per annum so Natural England is seeking new ways to run the service more efficiently and to obtain funding from alternative sources. A final report, presenting the conclusions of the review, will be provided early in 2018.

### Ballingham Railway Tunnel – Bat Survey for Swarming Activity

In September, HMG trapped at Ballingham Railway Tunnel for the first time to determine whether the tunnel was used for swarming activity. A total of 12 bats, 6 Natterer's, 2 Whiskered, 1 lesser horseshoe, 2 barbastelles and 1 brown long-eared bat were captured during the evening. There was a lot of lesser horseshoe activity inside the tunnel but not a huge amount of activity on the 4 Anabat Express detectors positioned along the track-bed. However, the bat detector positioned at the tunnel portal had 400 recording files mainly from *Myotis* bats with a moderate amount of activity from lesser horseshoe bats and barbastelles. Even though Daubenton's bat was not captured during the evening it was picked up on bat detectors, as were both soprano and common pipistrelles, so 8 species were detected overall.



**Photo: David and Giles installing harp traps at the tunnel entrance.**



**Photo: There was a moderate amount Barbastelle Activity during the survey**

## Bat Box Checks

HMG members were joined at the Brilley Green Dingle bat box check in September by the local HWT volunteers. They were introduced to 10 soprano pipistrelles and a noctule. Sadly the long-eared bats were not encountered at the visit which was a pity. At least they encountered one of our largest bats, the noctule.



**Photo: HWT volunteers joined HMG at a bat box check at HWT's Brilley Green Dingle in September.**

In September, 18 BLE's were encountered at HWT's Titley Pool; 6 adult females, 4 of which were post-lactating, 1 adult male in full breeding condition and 11 juveniles, 9 of which were males.



**Photo: BLEs encountered at September box check at Titley Pool**

Two bat box checks took place at Lea and Paget's Wood in September and October but we failed to find our brown long-eared bats. We suspect they were roosting at Lower Fishpool House. However we did find 4 Natterer's bats in a bat box, 3 adult females and 1 adult male, probably young of the year. A colony of Natterer's has been turning up in bat boxes at the end of the season for the last few years and in 2016 we radio-tracked an adult female who lead us to 2 tree roosts nearby.



**Photo: 4 Natterer's bat found in a bat box in Lea and Paget's Wood**

We were not expecting to find many Bechstein's bats at the September check at Old Country Wood, but 26 of our Bechstein's were still in the

wood as well as 15 brown long-eared bats. Overall the Bechstein's bats have had a much better year and bred successfully. We also observed a harem of 8 pipistrelles. We encountered our bald male juvenile Bechstein's bat for the second time; his condition has worsened since our last visit.



**Photo: A bald Bechstein's bat encountered on two occasions at Old Country Wood.**

### **Project Work in 2018**

We will continue with the Bats and Swifts in Church Project which is one of HMG's most important and worthwhile projects. Bat box checks will take place throughout the summer and dates will be posted on the website. The Woodland Bat Project will also continue with the main focus on the Woolhope Dome Radio-Tracking Project which is scheduled for week commencing 4<sup>th</sup> August 2018.

*If you wish to be able to handle bats at Mammal Group events you will need to be vaccinated against rabies. Take care to read the guidelines and risk assessment form before contacting your GP and make sure that you are able to provide all the required information.*

### **Water Shrew Project Update By Dave Smith**

The first survey for water shrew took place at Bodenham Lake at the end of last year. On 18<sup>th</sup> November seven volunteers met at 10.00am to place the survey tubes out at the side of the lake. Bodenham Lake is now being managed by Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, and we were given permission to place the tubes on the far side of

the lake which is usually closed off to the public. In total twenty tubes were secured in four different locations and baited with fly casters and meal worms. Once in place, they were left in situ for two weeks, as they are designed for animals to freely enter and leave the tubes without being trapped. We all returned on December 2<sup>nd</sup> to collect in the tubes and see if we had been left any droppings. We were met with mixed results; some tubes had not been visited and all the bait was still in place. Of the ones which had been visited, some had droppings in and others did not. All the droppings were collected up into containers and labelled with a location and date. once we have enough samples from other sites, all the droppings will be examined under microscope for evidence of riparian invertebrate remains. This is the method used to establish whether the droppings have been left by water shrew or other small mammals. The next survey will take place at Tuck mill at the end of January (date to be confirmed). A series of further surveys will take place throughout the spring and summer of 2018.



## Dormouse Co-ordinator Update by Ann Bowker

In the Autumn Newsletter I reported that no dormice had been found in the three woods to the North-west of Hereford, but since then Joe Allsopp found a nest (pictured), which was clearly made by a dormouse, in Badnage Wood. He left it in place for a couple more weeks but unfortunately when he returned, the tube had disappeared! However, at least we did find evidence of dormice there. At Credenhill there was no sign and I have since been in touch with two members who did a similar survey some 12 years ago with similar results (and therefore not recorded at the HBRC), so we can be pretty certain that no dormice live there. Moorhouse Coppice is only just big enough to support a population, according to early research in the County, but has some excellent habitat. Unfortunately, we found no signs there either.



This year I'm thinking that, rather than go somewhere new, it would be useful to take a look at the woodlands close to Badnage to see whether the dormouse are spread along there too. There is an unnamed wood south-west of Canon Pyon with a track up the hill and there is also a track running to the south of Ostey Wood, Garnstone Wood and on to Burton Hill according to the map. A survey anywhere along there would be useful, but we need to find out who

owns the woodland and get their permission to do it. Any information that members may have about that area would be much appreciated – Please email Ann.

I send my grateful thanks to all those who took part in the survey for 2017, especially Felicity, Joe and Nick for their help with the organisation and running of our checks.

Only seven of our listed NDMP sites sent in records for 2017, all had dormice, six of them with 6 dormice or less during the year and 9 or less empty nests. Queenswood, Dymock continues to buck the trend, with large numbers of dormice seen and also of empty nests. Magic!!

## Wildlife Cameras

The Mammal Group recently has acquired two Bushnell Trail Cameras, funded by a *Community Matters* grant awarded by the Hereford branch of Waitrose.

These cameras will be available for members to use for mammal recording in Herefordshire. However, since these are expensive items, members wishing to use one of these cameras must agree to take full responsibility for any loss or damage whilst it is in their care. (Replacement cost is currently about £150 each).

Contact: David Lee



## Herefordshire Mammal Group is celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> year!

To celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2018 we would like to launch the **Herefordshire Mammal Group Wildlife Photo Competition**. We would encourage all members to get out and about in our beautiful County and take photos of wildlife for us all to share. The winning entries will be announced at the annual AGM in October 2018.

Rules of the completion:

- The photo must be of wildlife and have been taken in Herefordshire. Please include species, date & location of your photo with your submission
- Entrants will retain the copyright of the photo but give HMG rights to publish and exhibit their photo free of charge
- The photography must be no larger than 5Mb in size
- All photos must be submitted digitally to Leigh Russell by no later than Friday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2018



Prizes for the winners of the Herefordshire Mammal Group Wildlife Photo Competition 2018 will be announced soon.

## HMG CONTACTS

**Chairman, Bat Co-ordinator and Group Mammal Recorder** – Denise Foster  
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**Small Mammal Co-ordinator** – Dave Smith  
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