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HEREFORDSHIRE MAMMAL GROUP WINTER NEWSLETTER

(December 2013 to February 2014)

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Winter Talks and Events

December 2013

Winter Talk: Reintroduction of Beavers in the UK

Nick Underhill-Day

Wednesday, 18 December 2013, 19:30

Nick has worked as a research scientist and is presently an ecologist.

In 2011, a partnership between the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (aka Slimbridge) and the Wildlife Research and Conservation Unit of Oxford University appointed Nick Underhill-day to undertake a 6-month scoping study on the reintroduction of Eurasian Beaver in the UK.

Nick's presentation on the 18th December is going to highlight some interesting facts on the life of this fascinating mammal.

Bunch of Carrots Inn, Hampton Bishop, Hereford, HR1 4JR. Entrance fee: HMG Members - £2.00; Non-members - £4.00

January 2014

Bat Box /Dormouse Box Maintenance day

18th January 2014 at Ast Wood.

Contact Dave Smith for more details.

Tel: - 01432 266937 Mob: 07905849842

Email: davetreesmith@aol.com

Winter Talk: North Wales Serotine Project

Sam Dyer, Clwyd Bat Group

Wednesday, 22 January 2014, 19:30

A 2-phase project and a collaboration of 3 bat groups puts Serotines on the map for North Wales. The methods used in this exciting project resulted in some fascinating insights into the behaviour of this species.

Bunch of Carrots Inn, Hampton Bishop, Hereford, HR1 4JR. Entrance fee: HMG Members - £2.00; Non-members - £4.00

February 2014

Tree ID Workshop – At Lea and Pagets Wood

with Martin Hales – 22 February 2014

Contact Martin Hales if you want to attend and for more details.

wildwaysmartin@btinternet.com

Winter Talk: The Small Myotis Project

Philip Brown, Bristol University

Friday, 28 February 2014, 19:30

The recent discovery of *Myotis alcathoe* in Britain raises questions about the current information regarding the distribution and habitat use of *M. brandtii* and *M. mystacinus*. This project studies the resource partitioning between the three species and Philip Brown has been surveying woodlands next to and away from water bodies across the South of England and the Midlands. The surveying is now complete and Philip is going to present some of these findings.

Bunch of Carrots Inn, Hampton Bishop, Hereford,
HR1 4JR. Entrance fee: HMG Members - £2.00;
Non-members - £4.00

NEW MEMBERS

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

Sue Holland	Lesley Taylor	Stella Hurdridge
Neville Hart	Jane Sedgeley	Lizzie Croose
Elen Sentier	Madeline Powell	

NEWS IN BRIEF

Future Newsletters

HMG Committee would welcome more articles from the membership for inclusion in future newsletters. This can be a "News In Brief" or a longer article. Please send us your interesting findings for the next newsletter which we plan to publish in early March 2014.

Harvest Mouse Jackpot *by Dave Smith*



I had a days work cancelled on Wednesday, so set off to find my first new site for the National Harvest Mouse Survey, and purely by chance came across a field with an abundance of suitable habitat. I managed to track down the owner straight away, who turned out to be very friendly and managed all his fields purely for wildlife. I set out my four 10 x 10 meter squares and found my

first nest in six minutes. This was closely followed by another, and then another..... At the end of my one hour search I had found twelve nests, and then just for good measure I found another one on the way back to my car!

Harvest Mouse Survey in HNT Reserve

A Harvest mice survey was carried out in HNT's Wessington Pasture on 10th December. Even though an old record existed, no evidence of harvest mice on the 200m x 2m transect was recorded. However, at least 12 field vole latrines, 6 field vole larders and plenty of runs were located in that small area - so a great habitat for small mammals.

Dormice in Chase Wood

After 3 years of tube surveys, a number of dormouse nests and three animals were found in Chase Wood, Ross-on-Wye. The PTES have accepted Chase Wood into the NDMP and have funded 50 dormouse boxes for next season.

Wild Boar Talk - Review *by Dave Smith*

Wild Boar and the impact they are having in the Forest of Dean was the subject of the second in our series of winter talks. This was presented by Hayley Clayton who lives in the Forest of Dean and also works there part time for the Forestry Commission.

Wild boar became extinct in the UK in the 13th Century, but after two separate unofficial releases in recent decades, boar have now become established in the Forest of Dean. With current population estimates of up to 900 animals, it seems likely that they are here to stay!

Haley Clayton carried out her initial survey as part of her undergraduate degree when she studied local peoples' perception of wild boar living in their midst. She is now part way through her PhD with the University of Worcester and is looking at interactions between the boar and other species of fauna and flora, and best ways to manage them in the Forest.

The talk was well attended and very informative. If you were unlucky enough to miss it, then be sure you make it to our next talk on 18th December where we will be hearing about the implications of releasing the European Beaver back into the wild in England.

Small Mammal Trapping Weekend – 27th to 29th September by Laura Dell – HMG Member

Friday

What an exciting weekend we had ahead of us! On Friday evening we met Johnny Birks, Chairman of the Mammal Society, along with other members of the Herefordshire Mammal Group. We got the opportunity to be mentored on how to use Longworth traps by the man himself. From this point onwards we all knew it was going to be a great weekend!

After placing the pre-baited Longworth Traps out with Johnny, I made my way to Frith Wood in preparation for some Bat Trapping activities. I did not want to eat too much prior to the bat trapping event because I had to leave room left for the sweet treats we would be having at bat base camp. We were not disappointed.

We arrived at the woods to the mad rush of Denise and David setting up a harp trap and various mist nets -Denise forever optimistic that we might find some Bechstein's bats. Just after 8pm we had a bat; a female Brown Long-eared bat...that'll do nicely! I got the opportunity of handling this beautiful bat (my rabies vaccinations are all up to date). Thinking this was a sign of things to come we all settled down for the night in high spirits.

Four hours later, the temperature dropped, the breeze turned into a strong wind and, as we approached midnight, there were no signs of any more bats. On a positive note, one bat was better than no bats and we didn't trap anyone in the mist nets– people can be very difficult to extract!



Photo 1: The female brown long-eared bat we caught on Friday night at Frith wood.

Saturday

Dormouse Day! Robyn and I were training with David Lee in Old Country Woods. Prior to checking the dormouse boxes, I got the opportunity to see the ringing of two stock dove chicks, which was fascinating; they were very well behaved.

Robyn is a trainee bird ringer and she was given the opportunity to ring one of the chicks. After that, off we trekked into the woods to see what we could find in the boxes. Bingo! Four dormice, one yellow-necked mouse, 3 wood mice, 3 baby voles (field or bank - not sure) and 2 bloody fingers later, we re-emerged feeling it had been a successful box check.



Photo 2: All dormice were weighed and sexed.



Photo 3: Juvenile voles we found in the boxes – a real treat!!

We made our way back to British Camp to meet with Johnny Birks to set the Longworth traps ready for Sunday morning but our dilemma was “where did we place them all?”



Photo 4: Robyn setting and placing a Longworth trap Sunday

Bright and early off we ventured to our chosen sites to learn how to process the small mammals we'd caught in the Longworth traps. After watching the expert at work we all got to have a go at handling and identification. Who was going to get that big feisty yellow-neck (Photo 5)?



Photo 5: The feisty yellow-necked was confidently handled by Mady.

I successfully removed, processed and released a wood mouse and a bank vole, which was hugely rewarding. The entire weekend was great fun and informative - I think I can safely say that everyone learned something new. Thank you to the organisers for a great weekend!



Photo 6: I got the opportunity to handle a wood mouse and a bank vole, which was hugely rewarding.

The Importance of Bat Box Monitoring by Denise Foster

Why set up a bat box scheme? Well, apart from giving bats additional roosting opportunities in a wood it is a good way to monitor what species of bat are using the wood. Bats that readily use bat boxes include pipistrelles (*Pipistrellus spp*), brown long-eared bats (*Plecotus auritus*), Natterer's bats (*Myotis nattereri*), Daubenton's bats (*Myotis daubentonii*), noctules (*Nyctalus noctula*) and, in some cases, barbastelles (*Barbastella barbastellus*) (personal observation). Some bat species have shown a preference for different types of boxes and at different times of the year (Dodds and Bilston 2013). For example brown long-eared bats are often found in flat 1FF boxes early in the season (April) and then they move into other, more spacious, boxes like the 1FS or 2FN in summer months (personal conversation with Matt Dodds). Woods will contain plenty of natural roosting opportunities and bats will take advantage of using both natural and artificial roosting sites (Phillips, 2009).

It is common practice amongst bat workers to check bat boxes on a monthly basis and these

checks normally start in April when the bats are emerging from hibernation and continue until the end of October, taking care to minimize disturbance during the peak maternity season (June/July). Monthly checks are a good way of sampling and each box will provide evidence of bat activity in the form of bat droppings and these can be identified to species level, in some cases. I have carried out many bat box checks over the years and it is evident that bats move between the boxes/natural roosts on a regular basis. Moving home can be influenced by a build-up of parasites or bat droppings, a change in the microclimate, bird competition, or disturbance from a predator or humans.

There are many types of bat boxes on the market and they have a range of different prices. Wooden boxes are very cost effective and can start from about £7.99 but they are short lived compared with Schwegler boxes. Schwegler boxes are much more expensive but they are very long lasting. They are made in Germany from woodcrete, which is compressed woodchip and concrete, and they are able to withstand the elements as well as damage by birds, rodents or squirrels compared with other materials. Schwegler's cheapest bat boxes (2F) are approximately £27.00 each, so installing a box scheme in a wood can be very expensive.

Bats will not only utilise purpose built bat boxes but they will also use bird boxes. In Wytham Woods in Oxfordshire, there is a long-term research project that studies the populations of great and blue tits. There are 1500 tit boxes located within this research woodland and, interestingly, when the birds have vacated the nest boxes, the bats move into them. Large numbers of bats in the form of maternity colonies are monitored in Wytham Woods and bat species using the tit boxes are mainly Daubenton's bats, Natterer's bats and brown long-eared bats. So it is always worth looking in bird boxes if the woodland has a bird box scheme (but only with permission from the owner of the boxes, of course).

The Herefordshire Mammal Group has a number of bat box monitoring schemes in the county and most of these are located in Herefordshire

Nature Trust reserves. These boxes have rarely been checked over the summer months so their occupancy regarding breeding populations is not currently known. However, past box checks carried out over the winter months have uncovered pipistrelles and noctules.

Personally, to open a bat box and be faced with a maternity roost is a most rewarding find and that is exactly what we found in Lea and Paget's Wood recently. In October, we found a maternity colony of 20 Brown long-eared bats roosting in a Schwegler 2FN box. During the same box check, we also found two noctules, one of which was post-lactating. This prompted me to look at the previous box checks and noctules (*N. noctula*) have been regularly found in boxes in this woodland.

In order to provide additional roosting opportunity within Lea and Paget's Wood for noctules, both Herefordshire Nature Trust and Herefordshire Mammal Group have decided to purchase 2 x 1FS boxes to provide a larger cavity to encourage noctules. However, noctules may have competition, as research carried out by Matt Dodds and Hannah Bilston in Bucks found that both birds and brown long-eared bats showed a preference for this type of box, so it will be interesting to see if this happens in Herefordshire.



Photo 1: Sarah Cadwallader checking 2 FN Bat Boxes in Lea and Paget's Wood. The two types of bat boxes in this wood are 1FF and 2FN.



Photo 2: One of the 20 brown long-eared bats found in a 2FN bat box in Lea and Paget's.



Photo 3: This female is post-lactating, as were many other brown long-eared bats in this colony – confirming this as a maternity roost.



Photo 4: One of the female noctules found in a 1FF bat box. One of the females was post lactating.

References

Dodds M, Bilston H, (2013) A comparison of different bat box types by bat occupancy in deciduous woodland, Buckinghamshire, UK. Conservation Evidence (2013) 10, 24-28

Phillips, H. (2009) The Ecology of Choice: Use of natural and artificial roosts by Natterer's bats *Myotis nattereri* in lowland coppice woodland and the implications for conservation (online North Buck Bat Group website 02-Dec-13)

PUTTING HARVEST MICE BACK ON THE MAP

By Denise Foster

A National Harvest Mouse Survey, organised by the Mammal Society, is taking place during November and December in 2013 and again in 2014. National Surveys for harvest mice were last carried out in the 1970s and 1990s and the Mammal Society will compare the new data with these surveys in order to determine changes in population, range and distribution. The results of the survey will give an insight into the habitats and vegetation used by harvest mice and provide information to help secure the future of these small mammals in the countryside.



Courtesy of Mammal Society

Herefordshire Mammal Group is taking part in this survey and so far we have around 10 volunteers. There has already been one training session, led by Johnny Birks, which took place on 23rd November. It was really encouraging to see that 11 out of 18 people who attended the course were HMG members. However, if any other members would like to get involved, there is still time to do so for this year. Please visit http://www.mammal.org.uk/harvestmouse_survey for more details. This survey is running for two seasons so volunteers can get involved in the 2014 session if they miss this year's survey

window or would like to attend a training session before diving into the undergrowth.

In Herefordshire, there are very few harvest mouse records registered with the Herefordshire Biological Records Centre. In fact there are only 27 with no records at all submitted since 2005, so this survey is particularly important for Herefordshire.

Harvest mice are Britain's smallest rodents, these tiny mice weighing in at only 4-8g with head-body length of about 5cm and a remarkable prehensile tail of similar length. They are elusive, largely nocturnal, mammals that most people will never see in the wild (The Mammal Society website 02Dec13).

Their secretive lifestyle is one reason we know so little about the current distribution of harvest mice. Their strategy of spending the breeding season climbing in the stalk zone of vegetation such as grasses and sedges means they also rarely turn up in Longworth traps, which are normally placed on the ground. (The Mammal Society website 02Dec13).

Whilst it is recommended that surveyors attend a Harvest Mouse training event, if you missed the local event and still want to be involved then you are welcome to take part and detailed survey instructions can be downloaded from the Mammal Society website.

Johnny Birks, the Chairman of the Mammal Society and HMG member, led this training session, which took place on the Malvern Hills on the 23 November 2013 (Photo 1).

From a personal point of view, I realised very early on in the training that I was not suitably dressed for such a survey. Wearing suitable clothing to enter brambles and other prickly vegetation is vital. Johnny was well prepared for this event; he was able to tackle the most vicious vegetation without fear. A wax jacket, wax hat, hard wearing waterproof trousers, sturdy footwear and thick leather gloves were essential. The hat is very important, as woolly hats are never going to withstand such treatment amongst the bramble patches!

During the survey introduction, Johnny showed us samples of harvest mouse nests from previous searches and some volunteers brought their own; one particular nest was very impressive (see photo 2).



Photo 1 – Johnny Birks briefing the group about survey methods and showing a sample harvest mouse nest for identification purposes



Photo 2 – This sample harvest mouse nest was brought by one of the trainee volunteers

The Malvern Hills has some very good habitat, especially rough grassland areas, and there are many species including adders that take advantage of this superb habitat. However there was no guarantee that Johnny would find harvest mouse nests for the purpose of the training session. However, Nicky Quinn (Malvern Hills Conservators Warden) had already found one in the same area whilst brush-cutting in a wet flush during the previous week. However there was no guarantee we would find any more.

We reached the survey area on the hillside and Johnny demonstrated the searching technique (Photo 3). This technique had the “no fear” approach and he tackled the vegetation with confidence as shown. The ground was extremely boggy so waterproof trousers were essential. Because my attire was totally unsuitable, my nest searching abilities were rather “girly” (but I’ll be much better prepared next time!). However there were some natural nest finders amongst the group and HMG’s very own Joe Allsop was the star of the training session, finding 3 of the afternoon’s total of 5 nests (Photo 4)!! HMG’s Laura Dell and Robyn Guppy also found a very nice field vole nest and a latrine and it was very interesting to see the difference between the two types of nest.



Photo 3: Johnny demonstrating his “no fear” methods of surveying for harvest mice



Photo 4: Joe Allsop looking very proud of his findings.

The training session was a great success; 5 nests had been found in a very short period of time (Photo 5).



Photo 5: The most impressive harvest mice nest found during the training session.

Following on from the training session, most of the volunteers have by now received their allocated hectad from the Mammal Society (a hectad is less of a mouthful than “10 x 10 km square”!). I have already chosen my two sites within my hectad, which must be at least 1km apart. I was able to find one site where harvest mouse nests were recorded about 12 years ago so it will be interesting to see if they are still there. My second site is a new site.

I am really looking forward to developing my nest finding skills and if we succeed in finding more sites that support this very small mammal, it will enable us as a group to help to conserve this habitat and in the process boost the number of harvest mouse records which currently stands at only 27 for the whole of Herefordshire.

WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK

HMG has a website which is updated with our news, details and also a library of pictures of our work and events, please check it out at the below link.

<http://ham.btck.co.uk>

HMG also has an active Facebook page where we post all our events past and present. We currently have 68 members

<https://www.facebook.com/denise.foster.140#/groups/222077991279736/>

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