

MAMMALS REPORT 2000-2010

Richard Grogan

Introduction

The following report is an update since the last report on these animals made in 2000 (Proc. Isle of Wight nat. Hist. Archaeol. Soc **16**: 85-87). The records are based primarily from submissions from members of the Mammal, Reptiles and Amphibians Section of the Isle of Wight Natural History and Archaeological Society, first established in 1963.

A recent revision of the Handbook of British Mammals (Harris and Yalden 2008) has confirmed a number of changes in mammal classification and observations about mammals on the Isle of Wight. These changes are reflected here. This report does not cover reports on bats (Chiroptera) or marine mammals (Pinnipedia and Cetacea) as these are reported by other groups within the Society.

A number of surveys of mammals have been carried out over the past decade, in response to the Isle of Wight Biodiversity Action Plan process, and these are reported here.

Of the 58 listed species of mammal in Britain (27 native, 14 introduced and 17 bats -excluding cetacea), the Isle of Wight harbours 32 (13 native, 7 introduced and 14 bats). However the Isle of Wight has an important role as a refuge for a number of threatened species including red squirrel, common dormouse, water vole, Bechstein and barbastelle bats.

Systematic List : Nomenclature and order based on Harris and Yalden 2008

Key : IWBAP = priority species, N = native, I = introduced, V = vagrant

Rodentia

Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*

IWBAP: N; Common

Although a nationally rare species, our native British squirrel is doing well on the Island though populations do fluctuate naturally causing low numbers in some areas. Recently reports have been received regarding predation by common buzzard (*Buteo buteo*). This is to be expected as buzzard numbers rise but the number killed is insignificant when compared to those killed by cats and cars.

Survey : 2010 : An Island-wide survey of woods over 1 ha in size recorded this species in 262 sites across the Island from a total of 291 woodlands.

Common Dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius*

IWBAP : N; Common

Another nationally rare mammal doing well in the Island's woodland although it is also found in a range of other habitats too. In the past decade found to be successfully breeding in many actively coppiced woodland with as many eight young in a litter.

Survey : 2010 : A Island-wide survey of woods over 1ha in size recorded this species in 189 sites across the Island from a total of 284 woods.

Bank Vole *Myodes glareolus*

N; Common

A common rodent found in hedgerows and woodland but rare in open grassland. The generic name was changed from *Clethrionomys* to *Myodes* in 2003.

Survey : 2007 : Bank voles formed 4% of prey items found in barn owl pellets analysed.

Field Vole *Microtus agrestis*

N; Common

A common rodent of open grassland where it displaces the bank vole. This species requires longer grass and will not occupy closely mown grassland, leading to its absence from tightly grazed downland.

Survey : 2007 : Field voles formed 50% of prey items found in barn owl pellets analysed.

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Water Vole *Arvicola terrestris*

IWBAP : N; Local

A nationally rare British species which is relatively common on the water courses of the Isle of Wight though has become increasingly scarce in the northwest. Free from predation from feral mink, Island water voles still suffer from the inappropriate management or neglect of their river-side habitats

Survey : 2003 and 2008 : 51 watercourses on the Isle of Wight were split into 323 sections and surveyed in 2003 and 2008. In 2003 recorded from 108 (33%) sections and in 2008 from 96 (30%) indicating a small decline.

Harvest Mouse *Microus minutus*

I; Unknown

No recent records have been received for this elusive mammal but records have been uncovered of confirmed evidence on Head Down in 1980. These records help create a better picture of this species together with known records from the Newtown area up to the mid-1980s.

Wood Mouse *Apodemus sylvaticus*

N; Common

A common rodent to be found in woodland, hedgerow and long grass, absent from closely grazed downland. Commonly found in houses in winter but tends not to occupy human habitation for extended periods.

Survey : 2007 : Wood mouse formed 15% of prey items found in barn owl pellets analysed.

House Mouse *Mus musculus*

I; Common

Common pest of houses both in urban and rural environments and unlike the wood mouse requires the presence of humans to survive.

Survey : 2009 : Twelve house mice were removed from the author's house in Chillerton over a period of four weeks. Activity significantly reduced in very cold weather.

Common Rat *Rattus norvegicus*

I; Common

An increasingly common species allied to damp conditions around watercourses and spreads from these habitats to most areas on the Island.

Survey 2007 : Common rat formed 7% of prey items found in barn owl pellets analysed.

Survey 2008 : 51 watercourses on the Isle of Wight were split into 323 sections and surveyed in 2008. Common rat was recorded in 220 (66%) sections

Lagomorpha

Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniulus*

I; Common

Common and found in all habitats where food is available including grasslands and woodland. No systematic surveys have been carried out recently. Myxomatosis is still present in the population and causes local falls in abundance. The effects of the increase in buzzard numbers (see above) have not been assessed

Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*

Native; Local

A locally common species on the Isle of Wight that seems to be prone to fluctuations in population with animals disappearing from sites years at a time before reappearing, sometimes in larger numbers. Found in farmland and downland habitats.

Survey : 2002 : An Island-wide survey of brown hare reported 200 records with good populations in Atherfield and in farmland around the Newtown estuary. Populations have undergone cycles of declines (2002-2006 and 2008-2009) and recoveries (2007 and 2010) indicating naturally lows and highs in hare populations over long time periods.

Erinaceomorpha

Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus*

IWBAP : N; Local

An elusive species commonly recorded from gardens and road casualties but less in 'wild' situations. A local hedgehog 'hospital' has been an invaluable source of records over the past few years. Anecdotal suggestions of a decline may be due to a shift of individuals or populations from areas with increasing badger numbers.

Survey : 2007 : The Society's 'Wildlife Watch' reported 145 records of hedgehog

Soriomorpha

Mole *Talpa europaea*

N; Common

A common mammal species on the Island, its presence easily detected and often unwelcome by farmers and gardeners alike. No recent systematic survey has been carried out of this species.

Common Shrew *Sorex araneus*

N; Common

A common small mammal found in both woodland and grassland across the Isle of Wight.

Survey : 2007 : Common shrew made up 24% prey items in barn owl pellets analysed.

Pygmy Shrew *Sorex minutus*

N; Common

A less common species found more in grassland than woodland on the Island. No systematic survey of this species has been carried out recently and this species was not detected in owl pellets.

Water Shrew *Neomys fodiens*

There have not been any confirmed recent reports of this species. It is included here as it is shown in the revised Mammals of the British Isles : Handbook to be present on the Island. Venables (1860) suggests that it was common at Alverstoke. Morey (1909) has no confirmed reports since this date and Frazer (1990) considers the species extinct.

Carnivora

Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

I; Common

A common species but no systematic surveys have been carried out recently.

Badger *Meles meles*

I; Local

This large species has become increasingly common over the past decade, increasing from its stronghold south of the central chalk ridge to occupy many sites across the Island, only avoiding river valleys and very wet ground. This spread has been blamed anecdotally for the perceived decline in hedgehog numbers but this has not been studied in detail.

Survey : 2000: The most recent systematic survey of the badger recorded setts in 678 locations across the Island.

Otter *Lutra lutra*

V; Rare

A vagrant species that was last recorded breeding in 1957. However the species is capable of crossing the Solent and records were confirmed at Newton in the late 1990's. Confirmed records were received in 2009 at Newtown.

Survey 2009 : As part of the national otter survey, Andy Rothwell re-visited all sites surveyed on the Island in the early 1990's. No records were found and the otter continues to be considered absent from the Island as a resident species.

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Stoat *Mustela erminea*

N; Common

A relatively common species found in a variety of habitats where dens can be found easily.

Survey : 2006 : 113 records of stoat were received from this Island-wide survey.

Weasel *Mustela nivalis*

N; Common

A species seen more rarely than the similar stoat but still thought to be common. A difficult species to survey except through observation of the animal itself.

Survey : 2006 : 60 records of weasel were received from this Island-wide survey.

Artiodactyla

Feral goat *Capra hircus*

I ; Rare

The population of feral goats introduced by the National Trust on to Bonchurch Down in the early 1990's continues to thrive. The herd consists of 15 nannies and 22 billies, the oldest being a 13 year old nanny goat. A small number of feral goats were recorded around the cliffs at Freshwater having escaped from a cliff-top property in the late 2000's.

Red deer *Cervus elaphus*

Introduced onto the Isle of Wight having been wiped out in pre-historic times. It is listed here as there is a domestic herd at Chale which is farmed for meat. This is a continuing source of records from the surrounding countryside but no feral population has established itself to date..

Fallow deer *Dama dama*

Introduced by the Normans to deer parks and subsequently hunted out. Re-introduced into Robin Hill where number escaped in the 1990's. It is listed here as there is a domestic herd at Newclose Farm, Carisbrooke. This is a source of possible records. However 'wild' Fallow deer can swim the Solent and may be recorded as lone individuals from time to time.

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