

# HMG News



Hampshire  
Mammal Group



Hampshire &  
Isle of Wight  
Wildlife Trust

## Spring 2022 Newsletter of Hampshire Mammal Group

*Welcome to the Spring 2022 edition of HMG News*

### In this edition:

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Hello and welcome to the Spring edition of HMG's newsletter. I met many of you on the video call before Christmas; and now we are entering a new season of springiness.

We have a great selection of articles this edition; **hares, harvest mice and other small rodents**. Plus if you feel like getting involved with a proactive project, you can become part of the **Mink Monitoring Network (pg 9)** - citizen science at its best!

As usual, all Hampshire mammal records should be sent to Andy Rothwell and photos can be sent to me for inclusion in the next Newsletter or saved for our next Open Day.

A big **Thank You** to everyone who contributed to this newsletter.

### Why not?

**We would love to hear from you.** As well as sending your mammal sightings to Andy Rothwell, why not send us an account of what you have seen for our next newsletter. Articles can be sent throughout the year and they will be kept until the next publication. Apparently there was a suggestion of a **member's letters** page? Worth a thought?

*Lizzie Susans, Newsletter Editor*

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## New Committee members

### Felicity Irons-Smith

I have been interested in natural history since an early age, having a mother who was a wonderful botanist (just wish I could remember more of the plants I find). While in London I was on the Committee of the Haringey Branch of the London Wildlife Trust and also went on walks with the London Natural History Society. When I first retired I was a volunteer at the Natural History Museum, doing administrative work in the department dealing with molluscs and pearls (I have held Linneaus' pearls – absolutely beautiful). Then when I moved back to my home in Southampton I became involved with Peartree Green, pulled the group together and managed to obtain LNR status for us in 2017.

Peartree Green LNR covers 51 acres and has some wonderful flora and fauna and species we record. I have been involved both with conservation work there, clearing paths and hoping to restore some meadow, but I have also taken parties of school children from local schools for mammal trapping, with help from the Trust, insect hunts and events fitting in with school curricula. I am hoping to be able to do more with children and a Family Event this year – Pandemic permitting.

I am also involved with Peartree Church (Jesus Chapel, St. Mary Extra) and we have set up a Community Garden at the Church Hall, recording wildlife. I have put down hedgehog boxes there and in the Churchyard – the Churchyard, which sits within, but is not part of the LNR, also has some interesting flora.

I am also a beekeeper and try and help new and aspiring beekeepers, and as Secretary of Southampton & District Beekeepers Association arrange all the talks for the Group. I still wonder what "retirement" is?

### Lizzie Susans

As a new resident to the New Forest I am pleased to find myself living in a beautiful area with more than its fair share of wildlife. It is impossible to be aware of the bounty of the environment here in the Forest however without being also aware of its fragility.

I have a general interest in all wildlife rather than specialising in any one species. Indeed it is the interplay between species and their environment that is so fascinating to me. I have now seen the Forest through all four seasons and see that each offers something different for the naturalist.

I have yet to find the elusive **pine martens** (see pg 13 for **Wildlife Watch Pine Marten info**) here in our new patch, but I suppose I might have to work harder if I am to achieve this. We are lucky enough to back onto a small woodland which is allowed to

have its fair share of deadwood (the recent storm producing a bit more for the ecosystem). Badgers definitely reside in this patch - our neighbour feeds them much to the delight of her bed and breakfast guests! It is our intention to make time to go and see them and learn more about them; this would be especially good for our two girls (13 and 10).

My eldest daughter particularly wanted to move to the New Forest, and I think a lot of her reasoning was that she knew it offered something in terms of contact with nature. These days this is something worth seeking out more than ever before. Wildlife Watch and the Blashford Lakes Young Naturalist Groups are great for getting young people involved and when I recently took my daughter to the latter I was very pleased at just how many young, enthusiastic people were there. Considering they have grown over the years from a group of just three at the beginning, it shows how if you put on these groups, they will come!

## Events

Please find below the mammal event listings for 2022, including HMG and events led by other organisations which may be of interest.

### March

**Sun 27 Mar - 10.30 - 2.30pm**

**Field Trip – Great & Little Posbrook Farm – Early Bird migrants and General Interest.**

[Southampton Natural History Society](#)

### April

**Tue 5 Apr - 7-8.30pm**

**Online talk: Water Shrews: the Wolverines of the Wetlands.**

[Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust](#)

**Thu 28 Apr, 7.30pm**

**Online talk: Annual General Meeting and then a Bat identification refresher session led by Nik Knight. - [Hampshire Bat Group](#)**



## May

**Thu 5 May - 7.30 - 9.30pm**

**RSPB Oxford talk Lym/Keyhaven** See details on Wild New Forest website.  
[wildnewforest.co.uk](http://wildnewforest.co.uk)

**Fri 8 - Sun 10 April**

**Mammal Society Virtual Conference 2022.** [BOOK YOUR TICKETS NOW.](#)

## October

IVCP small mammal trapping event - John Buckley. Details to follow.

## November

**HMG Open day and AGM** - hopefully in person! Details to be discussed at forthcoming committee meeting, following COVID and Trust guidance. More details to follow.

# News & Reports



## **Rodents in the garden and attic**

**by David Beeson, Forest Edge, Andover  
Down (Photos by David Beeson)**

The biggest reason for buying our home was its one acre of garden and the fact that we are adjacent to the second largest area of ancient woodland in Hampshire – Harewood Forest.

Over the thirty years we have been here the garden has been developed into an eco-friendly woodland glade that has featured on

Gardeners' World and in the RHS magazine.

We have had nine species of orchids flowering in the meadow, tawny owls nesting and even a visit from a white stork. Yet, with my interest in mammals, they have been watched as well.







Longworth traps yielded the small mammals: short and long-tailed voles, woodmice plus pygmy and common shrews.

Rats were often spotted but avoided the traps. Harvest mice would have been good, I have found nests no too far away, but the habitat is not suitable.

With the woodland behind I hoped to find dormice, as there are hazels around its perimeter and scattered in its

entirety. Nets, nuts, stripped honeysuckle and even apple bait failed to find evidence of the animals. Friends also came up with blank results. And then ....

It was November 2020, and time to cut back some of the shrubs. Including a low, variegated euonymus just one metre from the garage and there, about 700mm above ground level were two dormouse nests. One a breeding nest.

But, let me put this in context, it is 200m from the forest and the only complete routeway is via a huge Cupressus hedge (not ours!). On our side there are some mature hazels, other native hedgerow shrubs plus garden viburnums and berry trees. Not the location I would expect for a typical dormouse breeding location.



With a vast supply of walnuts from our trees and a feeder located adjacent to the nests, this gave us great wildlife camera images of adults and young feeding. And they remained active even during frosts nights until the end of November, when they moved off. The dormice always fed head down.

Some dormouse droppings were left on the feeder and were white in colour, and the shrub the feeder was in was a flowering *Viburnum fragrans* (farreri) with mainly white petals.





Dormice did not reappear until July, and only in singletons, while no breeding nests have been spotted so far this year. While the camera picked them up at the feeder none spent time feeding possibly as the offering was peanuts and not walnuts. In 2021 I will be supplying native nuts again.

During daylight the feeder (rigged to avoid most birds and rats) was visited by bank (Long-tailed) voles, but never at night. Nocturnally, it

was mainly yellow-necked mice with some woodmice.

Brown rats frequented the feeder's location, moving up to the flowers of that viburnum or a seeding *Viburnum fragrantissima* adjacent.

Our attic also has its small mammal visitors: yellow-necked mice and pygmy shrews. I did not expect the latter!

The camera will be in operation again next year, but the food supplied will not be peanuts but native, shelled nuts.

## Needles in Haystacks – an amateur's perspective

by Clare Lloyd Williams, Basingstoke area. (Photos by Clare Lloyd Williams)



Harvest mouse - Graham Swain,  
Rewilding Coombeshead

<https://rewildingcoombeshead.co.uk/photography/>

*I don't know about you but for me there were some aspects of lockdown that were distinctly advantageous. One of the upsides in my opinion was the amazing proliferation of on-line presentations, training courses and virtual meetings.*

I found myself spoilt for choice and sometimes managed to double book so I had 2 sessions running at the same time, one on the laptop and the other on my phone. That certainly gave me a great mental workout. I learned so much and on occasion was inspired to take action.



## Harvest Mouse talk

This was definitely the case for the harvest mouse talk by Derek Crawley on 24 November 2021. I had recently visited WWT Slimbridge (<https://www.wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/Slimbridge>) and the British Wildlife Centre near Lingfield (<https://britishwildlifecentre.co.uk/>) where they have some harvest mice and so had managed some brilliant viewings of these charming little creatures.

Having seen how tiny they are (as if the Latin name *Micromys minutus* wasn't enough of a clue), I realised that the chances of seeing them in the wild were pretty slim but, as with much of our wildlife, tracks and signs are the next best thing. So Derek's talk came at a good moment and was full of useful information.

## The Needle in a Haystack...

The title of Needle in a Haystack was incredibly accurate... Derek described the sort of suitable habitat to search for the abandoned summer breeding nests which are about the size of a tennis ball. Having also been doing some on-line dormouse training recently with PTES, it was very helpful to be told how to differentiate between the 2, one of the key differences being that harvest mice nests include shredded grass stalks and are woven into the surrounding vegetation.



*Nest 1*

## A walk with friends

The next day I was walking with some friends near Whitchurch and was enthusing about the talk. We were alongside a field margin of long tussocky grass which is what had prompted me to think of the training as Derek showed images of searches in this sort of habitat. Just as I was sharing my newfound knowledge (which I am not sure is always appreciated...) and saying how perfect the habitat was, unbelievably I spotted a nest.

I wasn't certain that my embryonic ID skills were sufficient to make a positive identification so I sent the photo to Sarah Jackson to pass to Derek who kindly confirmed my find. As you can see from the picture (Nest 1), it was a classic example and incredible to have been spotted so easily from the public footpath. Much less of a needle than I had expected. I recorded my find on the Mammal Society Mammal Mapper app and was hooked.





*Nest 2*

## **A mammoth (but rewarding) task**

I live on a large agricultural estate to the west of Basingstoke and have been asked by the estate to try and pull together a species list for what wildlife has been spotted there. A mammoth and never-ending task involving both desk and field research. So, inspired by my first easy find, I then started searching locally and came to realise how difficult it can be. It didn't help that I kept getting distracted by huge flocks of mixed finches feeding on some of the cover crops - I was looking up when I should have been looking down.

Eventually I found something that looked very different to my first nest (see photo of Nest 2) and whilst again in a field margin, in different habitat - a stand of bramble - but still characteristically woven into the surrounding vegetation. Again Sarah and Derek kindly reviewed my photo and sent confirmation.



*Nest 3*

Another one to be recorded on the app. Having established their existence on the estate, I have only been looking on a fairly casual basis since but was lucky enough to spot a third (see photo Nest 3).

## **Stay curious and the importance of recording**

So why have I bothered to write this article as I am sure many others have had similar experiences? I think that there are 2 key learnings for me which may be of interest to others:

- 1) It is very rewarding to be curious and take every opportunity to learn something new whilst knowing you have the back-up of professionals. I am not an expert but good training with a willingness to look, combined with Sarah's and Derek's support, have paid off
- 2) The importance of data recording and sharing of findings. As I continue with compiling the wildlife list for the estate where I live, without the incredible databases





of various wildlife sightings that are available on-line, my task would be even more challenging

*My thanks to Sarah and Derek for all their help and I hope others feel inspired to go out, learn, find and record.*

## **Mink Monitoring** by Courtney Brain



**Wessex**  
Rivers Trust

*This spring the Wessex Rivers Trust are launching the Mink Monitoring Network as part of the new [Test and Itchen Invasive Non Native Species Project](#)*

*This ambitious multi-year project aims to reduce the impacts of invasive plant and animal species on our precious chalk stream biodiversity.*

*American mink (Neovison vison) is an invasive mustelid species which made their way into the wild as a result of the collapse of the fur trade in the mid 1950's. Since then, mink have been able to establish wild populations throughout much of Great Britain. These opportunistic predators have had a significant impact on the abundance on native species, preying on anything from fish to ground nesting birds, and has been linked to the collapse of native water vole populations.*

*By launching a network of over 80 monitoring rafts the Mink Monitoring Network aims to reduce the presence of mink thereby reducing pressures on our native biodiversity. Our local volunteers and river keepers will be recording signs of mink, otter and water voles so we can assess the impact of mink control on our native mammal populations. If you're an angling club or landowner that would like to get involved, please contact the Project Co-ordinator: [courtney@wessexrt.org.uk](mailto:courtney@wessexrt.org.uk).*

## **Brown Hares in Hampshire farmland** by Andy & Linda Barker

Like many people, we have a particular liking for Brown Hares, and since 2007 we've become very familiar with an area of central Hampshire, where we've found them to be present in good numbers.

There are a couple of routes near Farley Mount that we've walked annually, in March and April, as a linear transect, recording up to 26 Brown Hares, and averaging about eight per visit.





### **Best time of day to see hares**

The best time to go is early in the morning, or else late in the day just before sunset, but we've found them to show greater diurnal activity at this time of year, as they're often paired up or looking for mates. You may be lucky and see 'boxing' hares, but more often than not you'll see individuals or pairs, and most often they're feeding or grooming, or simply sitting tight in their form. Every now and then they may amble or run across the field, offering great views.

### **Where do hares like to live?**

Hares like landscapes that have a patchwork of habitat to provide food resources and cover throughout the year. In farmed landscapes it is mixed farmland with a range of different crops and a bit of woodland that suits them best. We've found the southern edge of the chalk is particularly good. The arable land of the chalk tends to be dominated by large fields of winter wheat, spring barley and oilseed rape, with hedgerows, tree belts and woodland providing additional variety.

Although there are some areas of permanent grassland, especially on steeper slopes, it is the transition southwards off the chalk that marks a change to smaller fields and grassland with sheep or cattle grazing.

### **Oil seed rape or wheat?**

We haven't seen many hares in the oilseed rape, even when the crop is young, but if you scan your binoculars across a young crop of winter wheat, when it is only a few centimetres high, I'd say you'll have a good chance of seeing Brown Hares, as a young plant is sweet to eat and very nutritious, so the hares love it. As the fields are generally flat and the vegetation is low, it's very easy to spot a golden brown bump, even at some distance. As the crops develop, the hares become more hidden, so unless it makes a move, all you'll see is a couple of black-tipped ears.

### **Best time of year to see hares**

By the time you read this article in March or April, the winter wheat will be getting taller, and the hares become more difficult to see, but it's still worth looking along the 'tram-lines' left by tractors, as hares often use them. At this time, however, I'd suggest turning



your attention to the freshly sown spring crops, such as spring barley, or else winter cereal crops that were sown a bit late, or have made little progress in hard winters.

Again, try to catch these crops when the plants are just coming through and are particularly tasty for the hares. Whereas rabbits tend to prefer the field edges, the Brown Hare will usually be seen more out in the middle of the field, where it feels safest, so you'll definitely want to take binoculars when hare-watching, but if you know a good place and it's not too far to walk I'd recommend a telescope and tripod for really great views. You'll see the beautiful amber eyes of the hare, the lovely black tips to the ears and of course the whiskers.

## Summer stumblings?

Unless you stumble across a hare by chance, the summer months are perhaps a quieter time for hare-watching, mainly because the arable crops are all high. Although there are certain to be hares in there somewhere, they're well hidden, but after harvest there are renewed opportunities for hare-watching. We were fortunate to have an unexpected late afternoon encounter with a group of hares in late July 2021, when we were walking down a quiet country lane doing a butterfly survey. To our complete surprise we came across five hares feeding in a field of rough pasture very near to a gateway. They weren't far away, and were completely unperturbed by our presence, so we kept very still and quiet, and were delighted to be able to watch them for some time, before we decided to move away and leave them to it.

## Finding somewhere new...

Having had this lucky encounter, we decided to visit this new area on a regular basis for the remainder of the year. We wanted to see if the other fields in the area were also good for hares, and to find out whether they moved around from one field to another as the cropping changed. I wouldn't say it was a proper scientific study, but in order to standardise things a bit, we always timed our visits to begin about an hour before sunset and finish around sunset. In total there were nine fields that we visited, labelled A-I, but the last two (H-I) were added part way through so don't have data for the earlier visits.

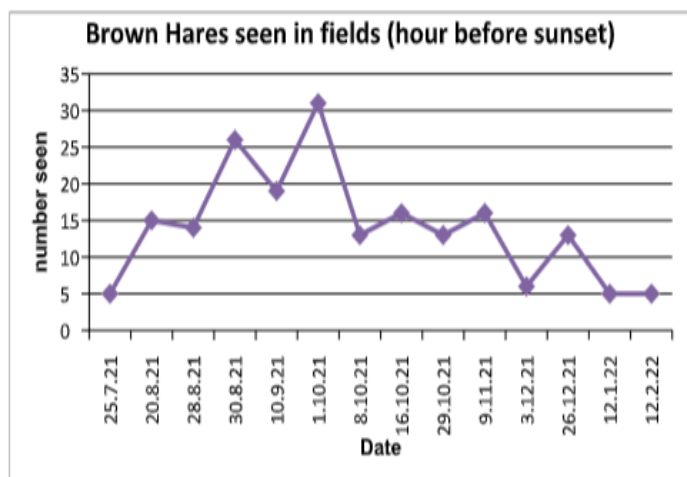


Fig.1 Cumulative total of Brown Hares seen in nine fields (A-I) 25.7.21



Fig.1 shows the total number of hares seen on each visit, and Fig.2 shows the differences between three specific fields (A, C, H).

The first thing to notice from Fig.1 is that at their peak, the best cumulative tallies (all fields) were 26 on 30 August and 31 on 1 October. The average worked out at 14 Brown Hares per visit, and as most visits were around 40-60 minutes, you can see why we found it so rewarding.

Although winter mortality may be higher than at other times of the year, the steady decline in numbers seen from early October to January is more likely a reflection of decreased activity when we visited. Brown Hares are mainly nocturnal or crepuscular animals, so to have enough feeding time through the summer, they have to start early and finish late.

Our visit on 20 August was from 7.30-8.25pm, whereas our visit on 26 December was nearly five hours earlier, from 2.50-3.30pm. From what I've read, it seems that during the summer months Brown Hares may leave their forms several hours before sunset, to start feeding, but in the winter months, with short days and long nights, they generally don't start until an hour after sunset.

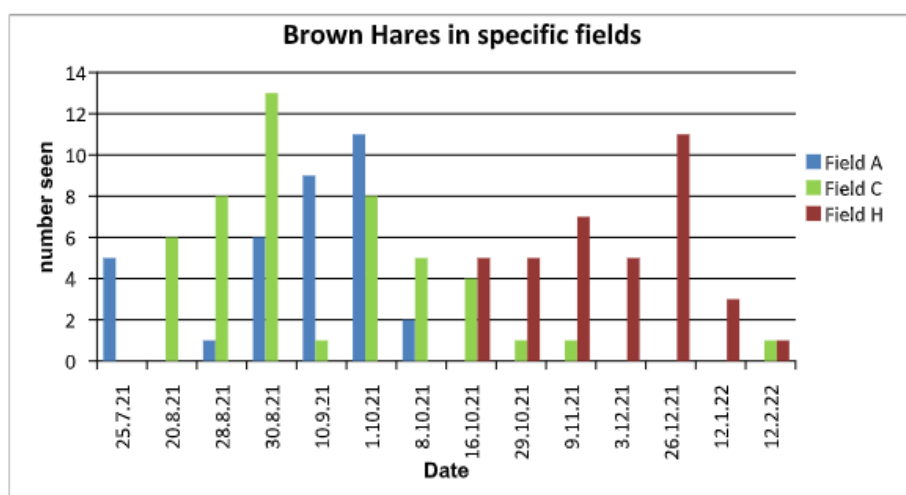


Fig. 2 Number of Brown Hares seen in Fields A, C, H on different visit dates.

The best single field counts were 13 in Field C on 30 August, 11 in Field A on 1 October and 11 in Field H on 26 December (see Fig.2). The combined area of the nine fields roughly equates to about one square kilometre or a little over, so the density of hares in this area would be at least 30 per square kilometre. Night surveys would undoubtedly produce higher counts.

As can be seen from Fig.2, different fields were better at different times of the year. Field A was pasture throughout. When we first visited, there were cattle in the adjacent field (B, not shown on graph), but A had no grazing stock and was tussocky grassland, that the hares liked to feed in.

It was particularly popular in September and October, when adjacent cereal crops had been harvested and had little food on offer. Vacant stubble fields that were manured were particularly unpopular! Field A became less popular once the cattle from B were moved into field A.

They were then followed by a flock of sheep, and by this time (mid October) the hares had moved elsewhere. Field C proved popular after harvest as it either had some new growth from spilt grain or was sown early with a new crop. We didn't monitor H initially, as it remained a bare field for a long time, but as soon as the winter wheat had germinated it became the most popular field and produced the highest counts every week from mid October through to January. Other fields also had interesting stories, but to keep things simple, were not shown graphically.

As you can probably tell from this article, we've really enjoyed our regular visits to these fields in search of Brown Hares, and have learnt lots in the process. Our plan is to keep visiting over the coming months so that we complete the annual cycle.

## **Blashford Lakes Wildlife Watch Group – young mammal enthusiasts!**

**By Anna-Marie Dennis**

### **What is Wildlife Watch?**

Wildlife Watch is a part of The Wildlife Trusts - it's aimed at children between 5 and 15 who are interested in UK wildlife. Local groups, which usually meet monthly, aim to offer children opportunities to discover local wildlife and have a go at practical activities. Groups are organised and led by volunteers, supported by their local Trust. I've been a volunteer leader with Blashford Lakes Wildlife Watch Group for a couple of years now and really enjoy helping children discover their natural surroundings. After a break in meetings during the pandemic, a survey of our existing members found lots of interest in mammals!



### **Looking for clues and signs...**

We ran a great session in November helping the children to tune in to signs of mammals around the reserve including footprints, droppings, well used tracks, hairs, homes, feeding signs and bones. We finished off by having a look at some trail camera footage, dissecting barn owl pellets and identifying the bones, and making plaster casts of footprints (some 're-created' in sand using ID guides).



## Pine marten surveys

We as leaders have been fascinated by the rediscovery of pine marten in the New Forest, so we were delighted that Joanne Gore, an Ecologist with HIWWT, agreed to come and visit for our January session – themed around pine marten and other mustelids.

Jo gave a fantastic presentation to introduce all the British mustelids, and we were really impressed with some of the children's knowledge. Jo had also brought in stuffed examples so the children were able to get a really good idea of how they compare.

Jo went on to tell us much more about the Pine martens. Although believed to be absent from southern England since the late 1800's (due to persecution and habitat loss), there had been occasional reported sightings of Pine marten in the New Forest in the 1990's. As the use of trail cameras by wildlife professionals to monitor other species grew, so did the number of confirmed records. Last year, Forestry England, HIWWT and Wild New Forest announced that they would be teaming up to survey the location and size of the population, as well as breeding success.

Jo showed us how she has been surveying Roydon Woods with a set of trail cameras as part of this team. She showed us lots of interesting footage from her cameras and explained how she chose the best places to put her cameras, which were like wildlife motorways! Although Jo hadn't yet found Pine marten in her patch, we all enjoyed identifying the other mammals she had caught on camera (helped with new ID skills from the first part of the talk), and we finished off with some exciting footage from another part of the project area, showing young pine martens – evidence of breeding success!

After fielding lots of enthusiastic questions, and explaining that it's important for the public to avoid putting out their own cameras without permission (cue a few disappointed parents) Jo brought out the scats, always the highlight of any Wildlife Watch session! The New Forest Wildlife Park had kindly supplied her with a selection of pine marten, otter and badger droppings, we had a lot of fun comparing the smells and interesting discussion on diet.

I hope some other members of the mammal group share my enthusiasm for helping children have the experiences that will hopefully set them up with a lifetime love of our wildlife. So many children are disconnected from nature and we need to do all we can to change that. If anyone has a particular interest or project that they would like to share, we would love to hear from you!



# ***Your Photos***

Send in any mammally themed photos....



'Close Encounter'  
Marc Baldwin  
[flickr.com/photos/wildlifeonline/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/wildlifeonline/)



'Capt'n Jack'  
Marc Baldwin  
[flickr.com/photos/wildlifeonline/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/wildlifeonline/)

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[www.hiwwt.org.uk](http://www.hiwwt.org.uk)

Protecting **wildlife**, inspiring **people**



'Majestic in Meadow'  
Marc Baldwin  
[flickr.com/photos/wildlifeonline/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/wildlifeonline/)

## Some Useful links:

Hampshire Mammal Group Pages: <http://www.hiwwt.org.uk/hampshire-mammal-group>

Living Record [www.livingrecord.net](http://www.livingrecord.net)

Mammal Society: <http://www.mammal.org.uk/>

People's Trust for Endangered Species: <http://www.ptes.org/>

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