

# Mammals 2017

*David Anderson*

During the 2017 year 29 species of mammals were recorded in Bedfordshire, with records coming from 204 people. These observers sent in 1,128 reports via Adnoto. More sightings were supplied by email and spreadsheets but these records are not included here, due to the time needed to enter them into Adnoto. Of the usual species seen in the county, the presence of House Mouse was not confirmed in 2017 (see below). The first record of the year was on the 1st January when a Fox was seen, and the last records of the year were on the 31st December when a Badger, Common Rat, Squirrel and a Wood Mouse were seen.

## *Systematic List*

### **Grey Squirrel** *Sciurus carolinensis*

A total of 68 records were received from all around the county. Melanistic (black) animals were recorded 24 times amongst these records. More unusually, there was an albino animal in the Biddenham area from the start to the end of the year, and an article and photograph of this squirrel appeared in the Bedford Today newspaper.

### **Hazel Dormouse** *Muscardinus avellanarius*

Just 18 records were received from two sites – Maulden Wood and Studham Common – where dormouse box-checking is regularly carried out. Ann de Winter and helpers at Maulden Wood found animals from May to October; usually just two animals, except for in August when two adults and four juveniles were seen, and in September and October when three adults were seen. At Studham in October two dormice were found in a dormouse box.

### **Edible Dormouse** *Glis glis*

There were three sightings around Whipsnade Zoo during the summer, one of which was in the Gate House (Cliff Tack). These are the first records of this species for several years; but this is probably due to the difficulty of obtaining records, rather than a lack of animals.

### **Bank Vole** *Myodes glareolus*

There were 21 records, which came from mammal trapping, under sheets, cat kills and chance sightings. At Duck End NR (DENR), five were caught in mammal traps. The species is widespread and common.

### **Field Vole** *Microtus agrestis*

There were 14 records, which came from mammal trapping, under sheets and chance sightings. Only one was caught in a mammal trap at DENR, and five at Marston Vale CP (MVCP) from 20 mammal traps. The species is widespread and frequent.

### **Water Vole** *Arvicola amphibius*

Only five records were obtained of this threatened species. One was seen at Eyeworth, another was seen in the river Lea at Luton, and there were signs of feeding from Colmworth Brook.

**Harvest Mouse** *Micromys minutus*

The total of nine records included a single animal trapped at MVCP and another at DENR, and a drowned individual was found near the river Ivel at Sandy. Nests were found at Biggleswade, Flitwick Moor, on the Ivel at Sandy, Sandy Smith NR and Willington.

**Wood Mouse** *Apodemus sylvaticus*

This widespread, common and bold mouse was recorded 57 times. It was caught in mammal traps at DENR, Flitton Moor, Flitwick Moor, MVCP and Sandy Smith NR. The species was often seen in gardens (a maximum of three together were seen on trail cameras at one location), plus Wood Mice were also recorded from dormouse boxes at Maulden Wood, Pegsdon Hills and Studham Common.

**Yellow-necked Mouse** *Apodemus flavicollis*

The total of nine records consisted of: one at Flitwick Moor from mammal trap; two adults and three juveniles at Maulden Wood from dormouse boxes; one at Pegsdon Hills from a dormouse box; and three at Whipsnade Zoo from mammal traps. All records were of live animals, which were released at point of capture/inspection.

**[House Mouse** *Mus domesticus*

There was just one possible record for this species in 2017. The usual site in the Safari Park at Woburn was not trapped during the year but a visual inspection did find droppings, a good sign, but not confirmation of the species. This species is now endangered in the county, as it will not live alongside the other two mouse species which out compete it.]

**Common Rat** *Rattus norvegicus*

A total of 16 records were received, with a maximum of two seen together. Two were reported as road casualties. It is often seen foraging for food and is widespread in the county. However, it is frequently trapped and poisoned to control numbers.

**Rabbit** *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

A total of 37 records were received, mostly of live sightings. In May in MVCP 96 were seen feeding together. Two were seen being hunted and/or caught by Stoats; and one was found freshly dead in Bedford town centre in January, a long way from any known location. A singleton with possible Myxomatosis was at East Hyde.

**Brown Hare** *Lepus europaeus*

A good response to a request for all records of Brown Hare produced a total of 90 records. These were mainly of single animals seen in fields but there were four reports of nine together and one of 13 together. There was one report of a pair boxing; two of coursing; and three of road casualties. Due to the need for confidentiality no locations are given in this report due to the threat of coursing.

**Hedgehog** *Erinaceus europaeus*

Of the total of 94 records, 24 of these were of road casualties. In a half mile section of road at Flitwick Julian Knowles recorded nine dead animals from March to October as follows: March one; May one; June one; August three; and October three. There were several trail camera records from gardens, and Ann de Winter had nine together in her garden coming to provided food.

**Mole** *Talpa europaea*

Due to the ease of recording fresh new Mole hills, there were 53 records submitted. The only animals seen were two dead ones found on the ground, and one live animal seen on the surface.

**Common Shrew** *Sorex araneus*

Just 17 records were obtained.

**Pygmy Shrew** *Sorex minutus*

This was only seen twice, once at Maulden Wood and once at MVCP. It is Interesting that this species is rarer than Water Shrew.

**Water Shrew** *Neomys fodiens*

There was a total of only five sightings. At two sites just a single animal was seen but at The Lodge (RSPB Sandy) two animals were seen together.

**Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes*

This is a common and widespread species, and 116 records were received in 2017. Many of the records were from animals seen in gardens but also as road casualties.

**Badger** *Meles meles*

A total of 109 records were supplied. These are all too frequently seen as road casualties.

**Otter** *Lutra lutra*

There are real signs of this species coming back to most of our rivers and smaller water sites. As it is an important and characteristic species, it is likely that almost every sighting is reported. The species was frequently seen at Battledon Lake, Clophill Lakes, on the rivers Flit, Hiz, Ivel and Ivel Navigation, and Renhold Brook, and also several sites away from water. Stephen Thompson got several trail camera recordings of an Otter scent-marking under a very small plank bridge over an equally small drainage ditch on the John O'Gaunt Golf Course in Potton. However the most recorded site was the Great Ouse in Bedford around Priory CP. Dave Kramer visits this area most mornings and in February watched four animals together. Unfortunately, there have also been a number of tragic drownings of Otters, which were trapped in fishing keep nets and what is suggested as nets set to catch crayfish.

**Stoat** *Mustela erminea*

There were 22 records received; all except one was of a live animal, the other was a road casualty. They were often seen crossing roads, plus others were seen hunting rabbits and on one occasion a Blackbird.

**Weasel** *Mustela nivalis*

This is much less recorded than its larger relative, the Stoat, and there were just nine sightings in 2017. All of these were live animals, and individuals were seen hunting a young Rabbit and a Bank Vole.

**Polecat** *Mustela putorius*

True Polecats are recorded mainly as road casualties. Of the nine records received in 2017, six were road casualties and three were live animals. A single Polecat-Ferret type was recorded too, also as a road casualty.

### **American Mink** *Neovison vison*

There were 16 records received, from tracks on mink rafts, camera traps, live sightings and two road casualties. The records came from county-wide locations and were not always near water.

### **Reeves' Muntjac** *Muntiacus reevesi*

This is by far the most common and widespread deer species, with 87 records received in 2017.

### **Fallow Deer** *Dama dama*

There are a surprisingly more Fallow Deer in the county than expected. This deer is secretive and nocturnal and yet 17 records were received in 2017. At Cockayne Hatley in March Darren Oakley-Martin counted 76; Near Luton Airport 50+ were seen; at Battledon there were two, one leucistic and the other with a red ear tag (Woburn escape?); and there were two reported at Tebworth.

### **European Roe Deer** *Capreolus capreolus*

Just two records of this deer, which is scarce in Bedfordshire, and both records were supplied with good field notes. Singletons were seen in Eversholt and in Southill. For less experienced observers, Roe Deer can be confused with Chinese Water Deer, as they are of similar size and colour with subtle differences in the face markings.

### **Red Deer** *Cervus elaphus*

In 2016 a second-year male was seen several times around The Lodge (RSPB Sandy). In 2017 an individual, which was reported as a female, was killed on the A4212 road at Wootton. These are very unusual records, and it may be that these are escapes from an unknown deer farm.

### **Chinese Water Deer** *Hydropotes inermis*

This is the second most recorded deer species, with 35 records received in 2017. It is active during the day and often is seen in open fields. The records come from a wide range of sites in the middle part of the county. One active site is the Flying Horse Farm at Lidlington, where deer are visible most days and Steve Plummer recorded 40 together in November when the species is in the run up to its rut. There were also three road casualties reported.

### **Acknowledgements**

My thanks go to the 204 people who supplied these records, plus any others missed in data transfer. All errors are my own, for which I apologise.

*David Anderson is the Society's Mammal Recorder, a position he has held in an honorary capacity since 2016.*