

BEDFORDSHIRE MAMMAL GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE STABLE, HAYNES ON 17 OCTOBER 2018

Those Present: Ken Winder (Chair) Ann de Winter (Secretary) Graham Bellamy, Richard Lawrence, Liz Anderson, David Anderson, Sally Gray

1. **Apologies:** Steve Halton, Amanda Proud, John Pitts, Wilf Powell, Pam Rumfitt, Paul Tearle, Cheryll Whalley, Sue Raven, Helen Gebler

2. Previous Minutes and Matters Arising:

- The minutes were accepted.
- Badgers: This item will be covered under Item 6.
- Logo Steve's illustration of a harvest mouse was accepted with the proviso that minor amendments are made. Liz will be seeing Steve shortly, and will request the changes.

Action: Liz A

- Insurance: We are covered by the BNHS insurance.
- A visit to the Tewin Badger Hide will be investigated for next year when bookings open.
- A harvest mouse nest survey will be undertaken early in the New Year at Langford Meadows. Ann to organise this;

Action: AdeW

3. Chairman's Report:

- Ken introduced himself as the new Chairman of the Group.

4. Treasurer's Report:

- Unfortunately, further action is required in order to amend signatories to the account. Ken has this in hand and will liaise with Helen. **Action:** Ken W
- Richard handed over statements to be passed on to Helen.

5. Reports on Projects and Surveys

- HARES: Ken handed out a map showing sightings received so far. Some good reports have been received but there are many areas from which hares have not been reported. This may be because these areas have not yet been looked at during the survey so we have decided to put together a list of areas which need targeting.

Action: Ken W.

The survey has been extended until the end of March 2019.

The BTO are carrying out a survey of winter birds and are asking for hare records as part of the survey. This could provide useful data.

Graham reported that the shooting of hares has been taking place in Hexton and Barton. This is of concern to farmers who are assisting with hare conservation, but shooting estates facilitate the shooting of hares.

- OTTERS: Amanda and Richard reported that a group of experienced volunteers will be checking sites from November 2018 – February 2019 as part of the county survey which takes place every five years. The Environment Agency has made available a small amount of money to assist with travel expenses.

6 Badgers

- The Bedfordshire Badger Group are still monitoring badger setts and are actively involved in any planning issues within the county. It was agreed that this is acceptable by the group, but that there should be more liaison between the two groups if there were any issues, eg: development etc.
 - Unfortunately, the Bedfordshire Badger Group are no longer sharing records with BNHS so any new information they obtain will not appear on ADNOTO
 - A discussion ensued regarding the placing of records onto the Google Earth site and updating sett information. Richard explained that this can be done via the BNHS website using an Excel spreadsheet. Old records should still be there in order that comparisons can be made. Ken and Graham will investigate how this can be done.

Action: Ken W/Graham Bellamy

7 Projects and Surveys for Next Year

- Hares – as mentioned previously, this will now run until end of march 2019
 - Otters – the County survey is being undertaken between No. 2108 – Feb. 2019
 - Dormice - it should be worth trying to find out if there are more sites where dormice exist in Bedfordshire. The suggestion was to possibly have a nut hunt later in 2019
 - Rabbits are under reported on ADNOTO and more records are required. However, in the light that rabbit numbers have declined within the UK and comments from people at this meeting that some colonies in the county have disappeared, it was agreed that a survey on rabbits may be useful. No details are available about this at present
 - .
 - Ann has spoken to Sheila Brooke and it is agreed that we will have a joint Small Mammal Trapping event at Duck End next year.

8 Membership

- Based on the information that Ann has obtained, there are presently around 30 members of the group. It was unanimously agreed that we need more activities in order to get more people interested and involved. For example, we could arrange for a mammal expert to come along and speak (David suggested Pat Morris) – this could be a joint event with BNHS.

9 Communication:

- Although most articles/information go on the website, we agreed that not everyone regularly refers to this. In order to improve communications, it was thought that a newsletter would be a good idea. Perhaps quarterly just giving details of plans for the future and ongoing surveys. Ann will put something together for attendees to have a look at and make suggestions.

Action: AdeW

10. Moving Forward

- All present felt that the Group could be more effective. Ideas will be sought from members on how we can do this. Some activities were suggested and these will be put in the newsletter.

11. Any Other Business

- Sally reported that she is supporting HR Chalk pit Nature Reserve in the Neighbourhood Plan for Houghton Regis.
- An International Deer Expert is looking into Chinese Water Deer and the differences in their behaviour in different regions/habitat
- David showed the meeting an article from 'The Guardian' on the 'trophy hunting' of deer species and sheep on the Woburn Estate
- David reported on the following:
 - That there have been no House Mouse records for some time.
 - A Harvest Mouse nest has been found near the Dunstable Sewage Works.
 - A Harvest Mouse was found at the successful Small Mammal Trapping event at Duck End NR organised by BNHS.
 - Edible Dormice (*Glis*) have been found at Whipsnade Zoo and youngsters have been found in dormice boxes at Studham. However, there are no other reports of them from elsewhere in the county.
 - An old gun emplacement at Luton Airport was previously adapted as a bat hibernaculum. However, development is going to take place on land surrounding this, but the emplacement will be left undisturbed.
 - My impression was that I was seeing less rabbits around this year, but sightings of hares were being sent in more frequently, so I have been looking at the Adnoto records for the two species.
 - The database lists 82 records for rabbit and 125 for hares. Of course, there is a Project underway on the distribution of hares, so people are making a special effort to list all their hare sightings, so that will skew the comparative numbers.
 - **RABBITS:** Of the 82 records, only 24 were for more than one animal. The max number counted was 20, but other than the one rabbit sightings most were of twos and threes, with only nine counts of more than five animals. There were 16 "dead on road" reports, but surprisingly there were no reports of Myxomatosis. There were no unusual locations for the rabbits seen, as most were in fields and on the road verges.
 - **BROWN HARES:** Of the 125 records, there were 27 of two hares together, then counts of three, four, five, six, eight, nine and ten and just one higher count of 23 together in a field. There were only three "dead on road" reports, and one report of a hare "dead on ground". All

the sightings were in fields, except for two reports of a hare seen in woodland. However there was a report of a Game Keeper shooting 14 animals on his Estate.

- David would encourage everyone to keep sending in your sightings. Actual counts of rabbits and presence of young animals would be welcome.
- Small mammal trapping is taking place every week in the summer at Marston Vale, and we could try and arrange for our Group to go to one of the sessions.
- Graham mentioned the North Chilterns Chalk Initiative which is trying to raise funds in order to manage and improve chalk grassland.

12 Next Meeting:

- The next meeting will take place on 17 April 2019. Venue to be advised.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 2125.