

Events update
Progress on the Cornish Coastal Otter Project
County Hedgehog Surveys
The Field Vole
Marine Rescue
Septimus' Land Adventures



Badger feeding on snails. © Jack Hicks



Cornwall Mammal Group

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What a Sei(ght)!



Sei whale. ©Peter McCarry

Passengers on a two hour marine offshore safari out of Padstow were in for a rare treat this July. They stopped for what looked like two porpoises surfacing but whilst they were stopped to see if they would surface again, they spotted something much bigger a bit further away.

One of the guides, Jenny Simpson, said "As we crept over, we saw it surface again and my initial thought was minke whale (a bloody big minke whale!). We waited to see if it would surface again and sure enough it did and myself and the skipper decided it was too big to be a minke whale. Minkes grow to about 10 metres (the same length as the boat) and it was definitely bigger than the boat. I knew that last year a sei whale and a juvenile fin whale had been spotted I so guessed it could be one of the two. Back on shore I checked the difference in fin shapes with the footage we had and decided it must be a sei whale. We have never seen one before and they are rarely sighted in these waters so very exciting to see."

Sei whales, one of the fastest whales and the third largest after the blue whale and fin whale are endangered and a really rare sighting on our coasts.

"It would surface twice at a time before diving and we were lucky enough to see this happen about five times. We haven't seen it since but have had a few minke whale sightings which we haven't previously had in this area at this time of year. Lots of common dolphins around too so obviously plenty of food!

- Jennifer Simpson

Events for Autumn/Winter 2018:

- **July 21st**

Small mammal trapping at Walmsley Sanctuary.

- **August 11th**

Cornubia Hall Friends of Par Beach 10th birthday celebration.

- **September 15th**

Trelusback Farm otter talk and site visit.

- **October 5th**

AGM at Chacewater.

- **December Date TBC**

CMG Christmas Quiz.

Always a fun night out and great to bring your friends along to. Victoria Inn, Roche.

Keep a look out on our website, Facebook page and for any emails for further details of these and other CMG events.

N.B. At the bottom of this newsletter there are details of events organised by the Cornwall Bat Group.

Notes from the chair: Dave Groves

At the last count Cornwall Mammal Group has 99 paid-up members, which I think is our largest membership ever, in addition to this we have well over 500 followers on our Facebook page and a similar number on Twitter. Attendance at meetings so far this year has been generally very good and we have presented to about 500 people in various guises. 2019 has been a very exciting year for CMG to date. It seems like a long time since Dave and Jack did such a great job with the quiz at the Hawkins Arms in December. Since then plenty has been happening. There has been the usual stuff of talks and practical projects - we have managed to get out as a group to conduct some small mammal surveys and EcoSoc members organised the annual Penryn BioBlitz. Alex ran a really interesting talk on the red squirrel project from Natasha Collings-Costello at Malpas (a new venue for us). Sue, Rob, Katy and Septimus from CSGRT gave a lovely talk on how to prepare a full-sized male grey seal skeleton (a project CMG supported financially). Alongside that we have been working closely with Cornwall Wildlife Trust and Prickles and Paws to set up and run Operation Hedgehog – trying to establish some sort of baseline for ongoing monitoring of hedgehogs in Cornwall. The Group also supported the project through the purchase of 20 hedgehog footprint tunnels which will be used in future surveys but which are also available for members to borrow to look for hog signs in their own areas.

The Cornwall Coastal Otter Project volunteers have been very busy – we now have over 30 surveyors checking sprainting sites around the county and we have received over 200 samples for analysis. Lots of these surveys have generated new records for otters as well as providing the dietary information that we want. The Project has also provided a chance to work with other groups and organisations and also to promote our Group more widely. We have particularly enjoyed the opportunities presented during our collaborative workshop at Exeter University and the various conferences and meetings where we have presented the Project and our early findings. CMG has also made some useful connections locally, for instance with the great Your Shore and Marine Recorders groups, and further afield with groups such as the Suffolk Otter Group and the archaeologists of York University. Among the many volunteers out looking for spraint we are lucky enough to have wildlife cameraman Ian McCarthy who, apart from collecting bucketsful of poo, has allowed us to use some beautiful footage of otters on the Fowey. CMG has been awarded £200 from the Alexandra Fund to help with the running costs of the Project, for which we are very grateful.

The Group has made some valuable links with a range of organisations recently – The Lost Gardens of Heligan has provided us with an excellent venue for both the CCOP meeting and Operation Hedgehog and we have run small mammal surveys at the site. The CCOP has strengthened links with groups such as the Cornwall Bird Watching and Preservation Society (collecting otter spraint and we are running small mammal surveys with them this month), the Cornish Seal Sanctuary and Cornwall Council (more small mammals and otters), the RSPB, National Trust and Environment Agency (Otters) and of course the University of Exeter and Cornwall College. We are also now represented at the meetings of the Cornwall Biodiversity Initiative and linking with the Tamar Beaver Group.

After several years of holding our meetings at the Hawkins Arms in Zelah which we really enjoyed, we decided to try some alternate venues this year to see if attendance would be easier – everyone is welcome to the meetings and it is an opportunity to have your say in how the Group is run as well as chat about your latest mammal sightings or project. Please check the venue if you would like to come along – it may be different to the previous meeting.

Coming up soon(ish) is our AGM – we try and hold this to coincide with National Mammal Week in October. This year we will be celebrating the work of Vic Simpson – so expect lots of otters and unpleasant diseases! We will be holding this on a Saturday afternoon and intend to include lunch as well as talks and displays – please come along and meet up with friends old and new. More details will be circulated as soon as they are confirmed. Venue will be mid-Cornwall.

The AGM is also a chance to get more involved with your Group. CMG is organised by a small committee and we always welcome support both for the day-to-day administration tasks but also for help in creating and running events. If you have a little time and enthusiasm to spare for Cornwall's mammals please come along and let us know. We are particularly keen to share out some of the committee roles to keep fresh ideas coming along so if you have any experience with running groups or businesses or social media you would be especially welcome.

I hope we can continue to spread the word about Cornwall's mammals and to be active in collecting mammal records and developing our own research.

Happy mammaling.....

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Dave Groves

CMG have had a busy time so far this year. We started in Fraddon on 17th January when we got an opportunity to see how the Seal Group had used our support for the preparation of Septimus' skeleton. Sue, Rob and Katy gave a great presentation about the process of finding and preparing the skeleton and also all the information gathered along the way.

We have run two small mammal events so far this year – starting in January at Gweek at the Seal Sanctuary where we caught woodmice in a range of habitats but also picked up records of grey squirrel, badger, rabbit and otter. Our trail cameras collected some valuable(?) brown rat records but the otter refused to perform. In June we set Longworths and BioEco traps around Seaton country park. Not the most productive day trap-wise as we caught only a couple of wood mice although we also picked up records of mole, roe deer and grey squirrel. We are heading back out to the Camel estuary soon so maybe we can improve?

We have been out on a couple of group otter surveys alongside all the individual work that the (Cornwall Coastal Otter Project) CCOP volunteers are doing. In February we were out with the Friends of Kilminorth Woods to check the East Looe river. Unfortunately the river had recently been in spate and although we found plenty of likely sites, we didn't get anything definite. Later in the same month we were out at Seaton with Cormac ranger Jenny Heskett and at Walmsley with Adrian Langdon. In both cases we collected plenty of spraint and some useful new records.

Natasha Collings-Costello gave us a great talk at Malpas in March on progress with the Red Squirrel Project – another sellout event -where we had to work around the yoga club to get at our cake!

Several members have been actively involved with the Operation Hedgehog planning and delivery over the year and more of us have been helping out by putting out and monitoring survey tunnels in May. We now have 20 tunnels which members can borrow to see if they can pick up 'hogs in their areas – check with Laura Guy-Wilkinson for more details. Many of you will have attended the Operation Hedgehog meeting hosted by the Lost Gardens of Heligan on 30th May which was jointly organised with CWT and CMG.



The nest tube of a Longworth trap showing the tell tale signs, (faeces and dragged bedding) of being inhabited. Image ©Angie Nash



Participants on the Otter Spraint Workshop at Exeter University, 30th and 31st March 2019

Naomi Sykes, the newly appointed Lawrence Professor of Archaeology at the University of Exeter, gave a fascinating talk at the 2018 Mammal Society conference about the historical changes in mammal populations over the last 10,000 years. Cornwall Mammal Group (CMG) and the University's EcoSoc asked Naomi to come and speak to the Group and after the talk we got to discussing some of CMG's ongoing projects including the Cornwall Coastal Otter Project. This entails collection of otter spraint (droppings) from around the coast and analysing the spraint to see if we can determine how much marine prey the otters are eating. As an archaeologist specialising in animal (and particularly fish) remains Naomi pointed out that this was her area of expertise and the only difference was the age of the samples – hers came from ancient middens, tombs and waste tips, ours were freshly collected from the Cornish coast.

As a consequence of our conversation a few months later 30 students (about half of whom were otter volunteers and half were archaeologists) together with half a dozen internationally renowned experts spent a stimulating and enjoyable weekend learning about fish remains. We were hosted by the Centre for Human-Animal-Environment Bioarchaeology at the University of Exeter. We started with a short presentation on otters, why the CCOP was established and what we hoped to find out. This was followed with talks about the skeleton of the bony fish and which bones we should be looking out for. We had

been looking mainly for vertebrae but we learnt that many of the skull bones are also distinctive and can be used to identify prey species. Although otters eat fish of different sizes they tend to eat the smaller prey whole whilst only eating the flesh of larger prey. Consequently many of the fish bones we find in spraint are from the tiny fish that are of little interest to fishermen. The reference text books and research facilities tend to concentrate on fish of commercial value. We found that information on some of the little gobies and blennies that otters eat to be in short supply so we discussed the practical problems of preparing reference collections of bones for comparison.

Whilst the archaeologists peered down their microscopes at a sample collected from an ancient tomb the biologists began to try and separate and identify freshly cleaned Cornish otter spraint. Picking apart tiny (less than 1mm) vertebrae and miniscule fragments of fish jaw bones definitely requires a steady hand and lots of concentration. Then the challenge is to compare the details of the bones to texts, reference samples and then ask an expert. We soon became pretty good on picking out salmonid vertebrae and eel bones but there was a lot of discussion about the smaller marine species and it became clear that photographic records and preservation of mounted samples will be very important.

Conversations and connections extended into the lunch breaks and later at the pub as we discovered plenty of common ground. The course underlined the benefit of networking and the huge amount of knowledge available locally which these cross-discipline events can tap into.

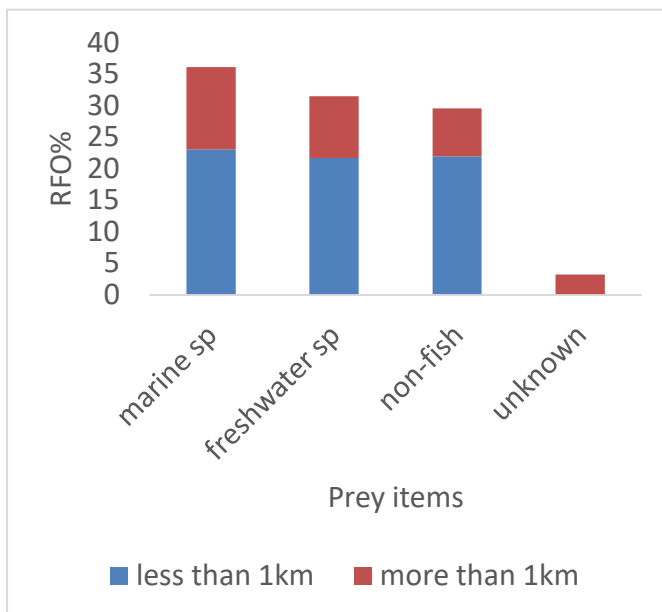
A big thank you to everyone who gave up their weekends to attend but especially to the course tutors: Naomi Sykes, Rebecca Nicholson, Sheila Hamilton-Dyer, Andrew Jones, Rebecca Reynolds, and Hannah Russ.

- Dave Groves

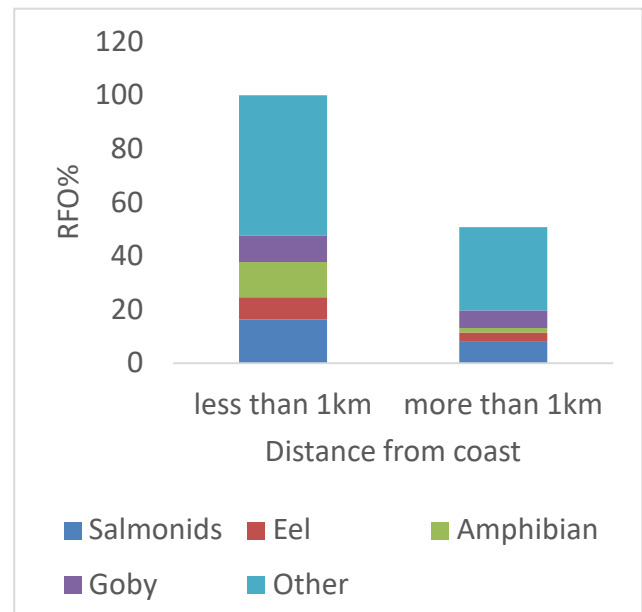
Cornish Coastal Otter Project

The aim of this project is to understand the ecology and diet preference of coastal otters in Cornwall, in particular otters under 1km away from the coastline according to GPS co-ordinates. Although otters can travel miles following river systems, they will usually spraint on the borders of their territory. Spraint can often be found in areas where two river systems meet or large surface areas where it will not be washed away by tidal change (e.g. rocks or hanging tree trunks).

Volunteers are surveying areas around the Cornish coast in the hope of collecting spraint and forwarding it to myself and Dave Groves as we extract the prey bones from the spraint and identify them to species or family. The results have been categorised into marines spp., freshwater spp. and non-fish, and compared against distance <1km and >1km from the coastline. However, due to difficulty finding spraint on the actual coast and more so <2km, the distance of marine prey seen in spraint may be extended to give a better understanding of the results. Below are some of the preliminary results.



Graph 1: The four most frequently occurring prey items in otter's diet in South-west of England in relation to spraint location from the coastline, expressed to relative frequency of occurrence (RFO%).



Graph 2: Variation in otter dietary choice expressed to the relative frequency of occurrence (RFO%) in otter spraints analysed from south-west of England between October 2018-April 2019

Currently we have nearly 200 spraint samples spreading from Marazion marsh, Helford to Welcombe Mouth. 70 analysed samples chosen at random have shown evidence of marine prey in the otters diet, however due to lack of data, there is no significant difference to yet show a correlation between marine prey remains found and 1km distance. Salmonids (salmon and trout), European eel, Frogs and gobies are the most frequently occurring prey items in the spraints analysed.

Progress with the Cornish Coastal Otter Project



European otter, *Lutra lutra*. Image© Dave Groves

CMG's coastal otter project has been progressing nicely over the year. We have sent out collection kits to 40 people now and many of them have been out to survey for spraint and we have well over 200 samples collected to date. Rebecca and I (with a lot of help from other volunteers) have cleaned and picked apart approximately 80 spraints so far and we hope to complete the remaining samples over the summer.

Once the work was started we began to realise what a challenge we had taken on. Firstly, collecting spraints on the coast is much more difficult than looking along river banks – otters have many more places to choose from and the seaside can be a much wilder place to explore than the riverside. Many of the 400+ sites we had originally identified as having potential have proved to be unproductive or tricky to access although surveyors have found plenty of other new sites and we estimate conservatively that CCOP surveyors may have doubled the number of otter records submitted to ORKS last year.

We have run two volunteer information and training days for the Project – the first hosted by the Lost Gardens of Heligan in February and the second further west was held at Gweek Village Hall in May. Audiences of 40 – 50 volunteers and otter fans at each event were treated to presentations on otter

ecology and background to the project, hands-on spraint analysis and some great video footage of our local otters on the Fowey from Ian McCarthy. For the hard-core enthusiasts, at the end of March we ran a collaborative two day workshop on spraint analysis with the University of Exeter's Archaeology Department (see separate report from Rebecca Smith).

Spreading the word, and also recruiting new surveyors, we have taken presentations about the project to conferences and meetings around the South West. In March we spoke to the Your Shore conference at Wadebridge and then to the Marine Recorders meetings at Gwithian. In April we travelled across the Tamar to present to the South West Marine Ecosystems Conference at Plymouth University. In March we went down to Ruan Lanihorne to speak with the Wild Roseland group about, amongst other things, otters. I was massively impressed by their commitment when one of the group headed out in the middle of the night to collect spraint from the local beach!

What have we learnt so far?

Locating and collecting otter spraint on the beach or among the rocks along the strandline is not straightforward. Some surveyors have had success and others have drawn a blank on the coast but collected successfully from the streams and rivers running down to the coast.

Identifying fish prey to species level is difficult – we have been trying to use vertebrae as they are comparatively easy to pull out of the cleaned spraint samples. We can identify salmonid vertebrae; but can't tell brown trout from salmon. We can identify cyprinid vertebrae; but can't tell if it came from a roach or a rudd (luckily there are relatively few freshwater species in Cornwall's rivers). Eel and frog bones are fairly easy to identify

but many of the smaller species, especially marine ones, are very tricky. We can be fairly sure of identification of gobies and blennies but not (yet) down to species level. Not all vertebrae in a sample are identifiable – very few match the reference photographs or drawing perfectly and the ID keys often presume larger species. Some species are present at a very low level so we have not yet been able to familiarise ourselves with these fully.



Initial separation of larger fish bones into those that look 'similar' before trying to identify using a key. We then tried to apply this knowledge to the smaller fish species we were finding. Image © Angie Nash

Our archaeological experts prefer to use skull bones in their work but otters have a strong tendency to crunch up fish skulls or, in the case of larger prey, not to eat the heads. We have found that opercula from bullheads (*Cottus gobio*) are pretty good clues. Otoliths, the small bones of the ear canals, are also species specific in their shape and we have found those from bullheads that coincide with their opercula – however, these small white

bones are obviously very tiny and difficult to examine in detail.



Otolith from Bullhead. Image © Dave Groves

Apart from fish species, we have found plenty of evidence of amphibians - probably frog but we have not examined this in detail. Bird feathers have been found in a couple of spraint samples as have remains of what appears to be great diving beetle (*Dytiscus marginalis*) and also smaller crustaceans – possibly marine shrimps of some type.

Early indications are that spraints collected less than 1 km from the coast contain the remains of a more diverse range of prey than those from further inland.

Several key prey species for the otter occur in freshwater and marine environments and therefore are of little use in determining the hunting area, eel and salmon in particular. So far we cannot categorically say if any of the prey species were caught in open coastal waters as many of the marine species are also found in estuarine waters. However, the presence of goby and blenny remains is evidence that Cornwall's otters are exploiting marine habitats for food.

Photography of samples is critical to recording but good quality photographs of tiny vertebrae, often only 1 or 2 mm long, is a challenge. However, this is important to support our identification efforts.



Eel vertebrae. Image ©Dave Groves

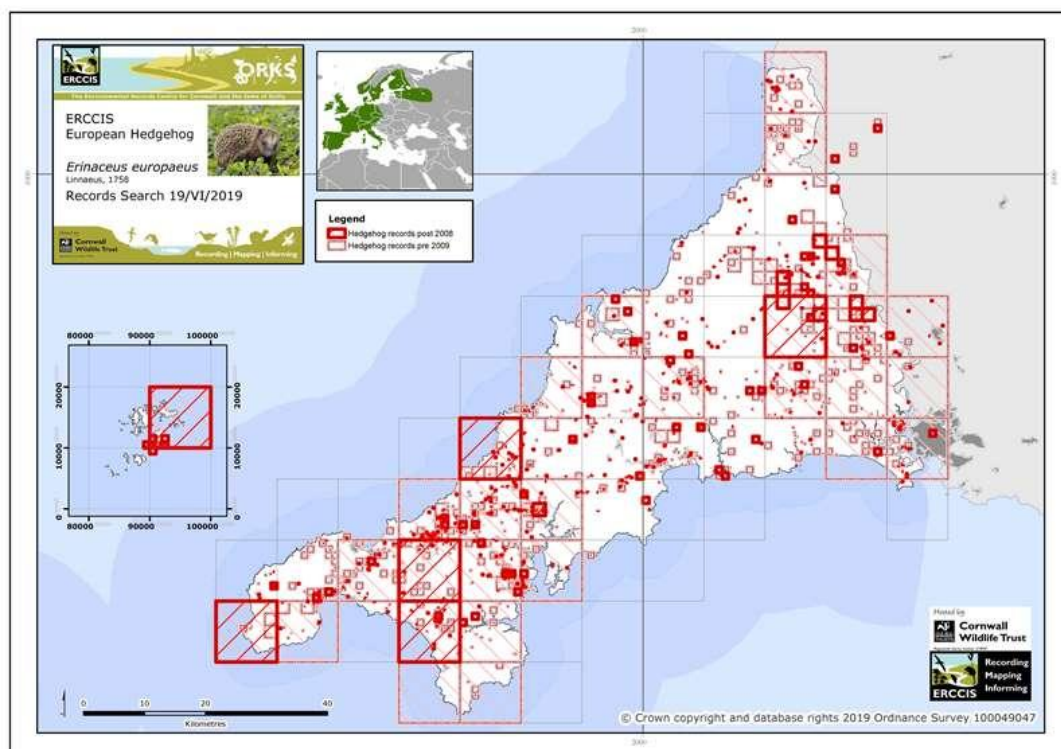


Tiny Goby vertebrae. Image ©Dave Groves

Like many research projects we are probably raising more questions than we are answering and we are already considering if we can extend the survey to look at changes during the year or perhaps looking in more details at those areas with more reliable spraint sites.

- Dave Groves and Rebecca Smith

County Hedgehog Surveys



The first county wide survey of hedgehogs has been completed!

An invitation was sent to recording groups, local community groups and college students and 50 people joined us at the Lost Gardens of Heligan in April for training on how to survey for hedgehogs. The aim was to see if hedgehogs are using nature reserves in the first place where they should be safe from human impacts.

The evening was organised by the Operation Hedgehog partnership of Cornwall Wildlife Trust (CWT), Cornwall Mammal Group (CMG), Prickles and Paws Hedgehog Rescue and the University of Exeter.

The evening consisted of presentations from all partners with a relaxed, informal conversation about survey protocol, distribution and demonstration of all materials and logistics for the survey week.

Held in May during National Hedgehog Week, the survey saw teams of volunteers place tunnels on selected CWT reserves around the county. The tunnels were filled with food to attract hedgehogs and footprint tracks were recorded on pieces of paper. The tunnels were checked over 5 days and all the data was collected.

The tunnels were then available for the volunteers to use in their own areas (gardens/parklands included) to create a clearer picture of hedgehog distribution across Cornwall.

Results so far show very few hedgehog records for the Cornwall Wildlife Trust Reserves but that hedgehogs were present in the gardens of the volunteers. This corresponds with the theory that hedgehogs are relying more on gardens and urban areas to find food and shelter.

As the first survey of its kind, this data is important as a baseline and will give us a better understanding of the state of Cornwall's hedgehog population and distribution.

September will see the next county wide survey and the hope is that this can be repeated annually to allow us to monitor population changes.

- **Laura Guy-Wilkinson**



Hedgehog day at Heligan. Image ©-Simon Stuart-Miller



Looking at the Cornwall Hedgehog distribution map. Image ©-Simon Stuart-Miller

The Field Vole

The field vole (*Microtus agrestis*) is probably our commonest mammal – the 2018 Mammal Society review estimates the population to be 59.9 million individuals (although with a large margin of error either side of this number).



Field vole, *Microtus agrestis*. Image © Dave Groves

Field voles are found in a range of primarily rural habitats, most strongly associated with unimproved grassland but also marshy margins (hence they are known as 'meadow mouse' or 'water mouse' in some areas. They are also confusingly called the short-tailed field mouse and, perhaps more helpfully, the short-tailed vole) and young plantation forestry.

Field voles are essentially herbivorous feeding mainly on grasses, both roots and shoots. They are the favoured prey of many predators, particularly foxes, weasels and birds of prey such as kestrels and owls. To avoid these unwelcome attentions the voles create a system of runways, tunnels and nests beneath the thatch of grass litter and within grassy tussocks. Here they build untidy nests of shredded grass in the tussock bases or under logs or debris.

Field voles breed from early spring until late autumn and may produce up to 50 young in a year – litters of 4-8 young produced at roughly monthly intervals, mothers feed the pups for 2-3 weeks and they may breed in their first season. Both sexes hold small territories and mate promiscuously. The animals are active

throughout the year and the day, although they may be more diurnal in colder weather.

Field voles have the typical blunt nose and small ears of the vole with a body length of 90-110 mm. The tail is 20-50 mm (about 30% of the body length). The coat is grey/brown and shaggy in appearance. The species most likely to be confused with it is the bank vole (*Myodes glareolus*) which has a smoother coat of reddish/brown, larger ears and a tail of about 50% of the body length.

Many of our field vole records come from targeted surveys using Longworth traps but occasionally records from cat owners receiving little 'presents' are received. It is also possible to survey for field voles using field signs – although their runways and nests could be produced by other small rodents they have a habit of collecting together small larders of cut grasses 1-2 cm long and characteristically cut at 45 degrees. Latrines may also be seen of green oval droppings 6-7 mm in length and 2-3 mm wide.



Field vole latrine, consisting of small 'tic tac' shaped light green pellets. Image © Dave Groves

Field voles, like some of their close relatives, undergo cyclical fluctuations in numbers perhaps in response to changing food supplies or milder weather. There are suggestions that falling predator numbers, due to human intervention, may allow these fluctuations to increase to plague proportions. When present

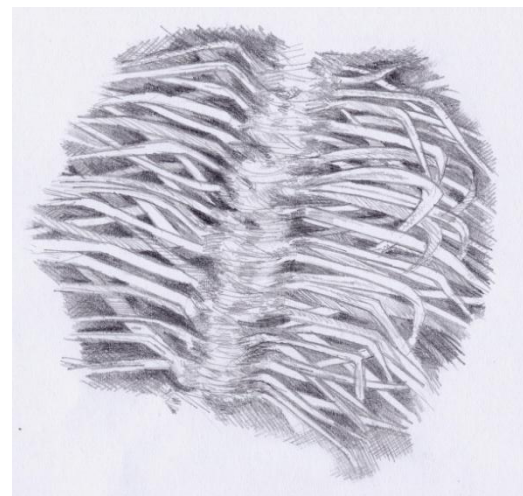
at these high levels significant damage may occur to pasture, crops or young forestry. Pasture surfaces can suffer damage from the extent of vole tunnelling. Vole populations rise and fall on a 4-5 year cycle but occasionally some external factor permits numbers to increase exponentially.

Analysis of historical vole plagues (which involve the common vole, *Microtus arvalis*) in France showed little regularity but that they occurred about 3 times in a century. The Greek philosopher Aristotle writing 2400 years ago noted these population cycles and commented that human or predator intervention had little effect on limiting them. The mention of vole plagues alongside other calamities such as war, pestilence, fire and flood in historical records emphasise their impact on human existence where the loss of crops could result in famine and displacement. Divine intervention was often called upon to prevent such depredations – the Romans appealed to Apollo whilst the mediaeval Christians favoured St Gertrude and the Germanic tribes the goddess Holda. Rat and mice catchers were often thought to possess some magical powers.

The earliest record of what was probably a vole plague appears in the Old Testament, book of Kings, when God sent them to punish the Philistines for carrying off the Ark of the Covenant. The Welsh chronicle *Brut y Tywysogion* of AD 893 describes “vermin of a strange species were seen in Ireland, similar to moles, with two long teeth each; and they ate all the corn, all the pasture, and the roots of grasses, and the hay ground, causing a famine in the country, and it is suppose the Pagans took them there, and wished likewise to introduce them into the isle of Britain; but by prayer to God, alms to the poor, and righteous life, God sent a sharp frost during the summer weather, which destroyed those insects” . It’s interesting to note that voles

were not recorded in Ireland until the 1960s when bank voles appeared in Kerry.

Other rodent plagues that were almost certainly of field voles occurred in Kent and Essex in 1580 and 1648, and in Norfolk in 1754. The Essex plague was reported as an infinite number of mice overwhelming the earth and clearing the grass by the roots so that cattle died. The plague ended when large numbers of owls assembled to feed on the voles.



Field vole run through grass. Drawing © Jenny King

Plagues of Field voles occurred in the New Forest and Forest of Dean in 1813 and 1814 and caused “considerable alarm lest the whole of the young trees in those extensive woods should be destroyed by them”. In South and Central Scotland in both 1875 and 1890 vole plagues severely impacted pastures and grazing over some 100,000 acres.

In 1929 field voles damaged new forestry plantations in North and West Scotland and in 1934 a vole plague around the new forestry plantations of Lake Vyrnwy of North Wales left the hillsides bare of grasses, weeds and young trees. In UK records, vole plagues seem to be associated with agriculture and there are few records before the introduction of extensive sheep grazing or plantation forestry.

More recently, in 2011, a five-fold increase in field vole numbers was recorded in Southern and Central Scotland, possibly as a result of a series of colder winters which had allowed vole numbers to increase as snow cover protected wintering voles from predators. Once the snow retreated birds of prey had a field day. The increases in vole numbers are often associated with increased numbers of owls, especially short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*) and other raptors, some of which may travel from surrounding areas to take advantage of the abundant food resource.

Because of the impact of vole plagues, especially in Europe, many attempts have been made to control them, although most would coincide with the natural decline of these short-live phenomena anyway. Targeted killing or the use of cats and dogs has little impact, ploughing up the ground to expose them to predation, using machinery or animals (pigs) has little effect. The French developed a biological control approach based around mouse typhus although both

this and the use of rodenticides probably do not hasten the natural decline of these vastly increased populations beyond that of the arrival of natural diseases including mouse typhus, toxoplasmosis and murine TB. Perhaps more importantly the population becomes increasingly stressed by the competition for food and space and this disturbs the hormonal equilibrium of the individuals with consequent disturbance of reproduction and metabolism. Few voles survive 12 months and reduced reproductive performance rapidly translates into a drastic fall in numbers.

The field vole is a rarely seen and only occasionally recorded, but relatively common part of Cornwall's mammal world but a key component of the food chain of larger and more obvious species. Another reason why we need to record all our mammals to increase our understanding of our own environment.

- Dave Groves

British Divers Marine Life Rescue, Call-out Figures 2018 Data

2018 proved to be yet another record breaking year for BDMLR call-out figures. Including calls to birds, turtles and other species, the total came to an impressive 1458!

If we compare that to 2017 when we had 1136 call-outs, and 2016 when we had 874 call-outs, we see a rough trend of an increase by a third each year (see Figure 1). Based on this, in 2019 we could expect to attend 1895 call-outs.

The monthly trend was similar to as seen in previous years, with peaks during the late

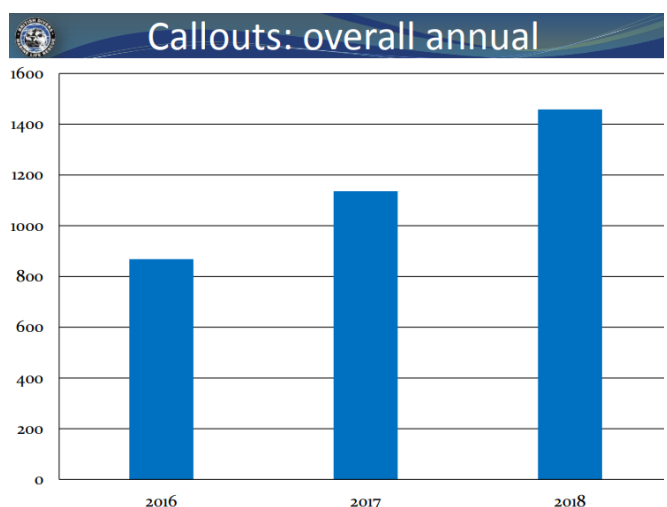


Figure 1. Overall number of BDMLR call-outs by year from 2016 to 2018

summer months for the common seal pupping season and then peaking again in December and January for the grey seal pupping season (see Figure 2). However, the 2017/2018 grey seal pupping season had been the busiest on record—most likely due to the frequency and intensity of winter storms we were experiencing. This culminated in 211 call-outs being made for grey seals alone in January 2018!

Once again, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, with just over 500 call-outs, proved to be the busiest region in the whole of England, Scotland and Wales (see Figure 3).

Calls to cetaceans totalled 117 nationally or 8% of the total. These tend to be more unpredictable in nature, with generally more of a peak in the summer months when our more common species such as the harbour porpoise and common dolphin are calving.

Cornwall's most recent cetacean stranding occurred on the 6th of April at Carbis bay, St Ives. A mother and calf pair of common dolphins had stranded on the beach. Members of the public had attempted to immediately refloat both animals but only the calf went out and the mother re-stranded shortly after.

Once BDMLR had been called, local medics were immediately sent to the scene. Here they can provide the crucial first aid urgently needed by stranded cetaceans, which acts to counteract the effects of them being out of the water. Once a vet was on scene, an assessment was made to decide the best course of action for the dolphin. She was in moderate condition and not showing obvious signs of ill health or injury. This along with the fact her dependent calf was alone and had no chance of survival without her, swayed the decision to attempt to refloat her as soon as possible.

Under veterinary supervision and using recognised techniques BDMLR medics successfully managed to refloat the dolphin, who swam off strongly into open water. We sincerely hope she managed to locate her calf, but as is the nature of this work, we rarely get to know the true outcomes of these animals.

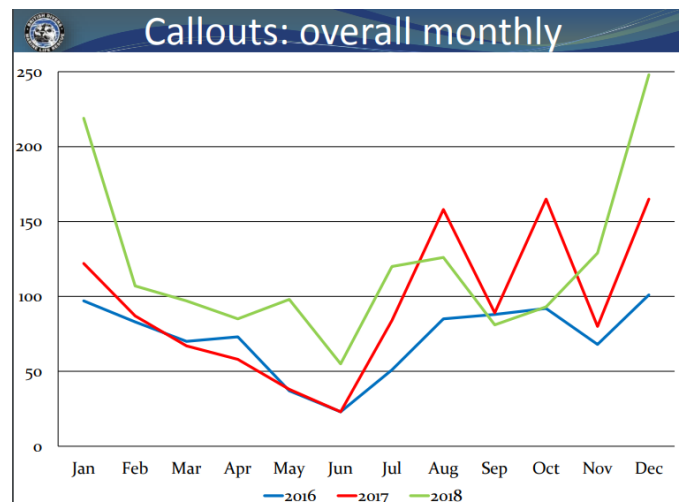


Figure 2. Overall number of BDMLR call-outs by month for 2016, 2017 and 2018

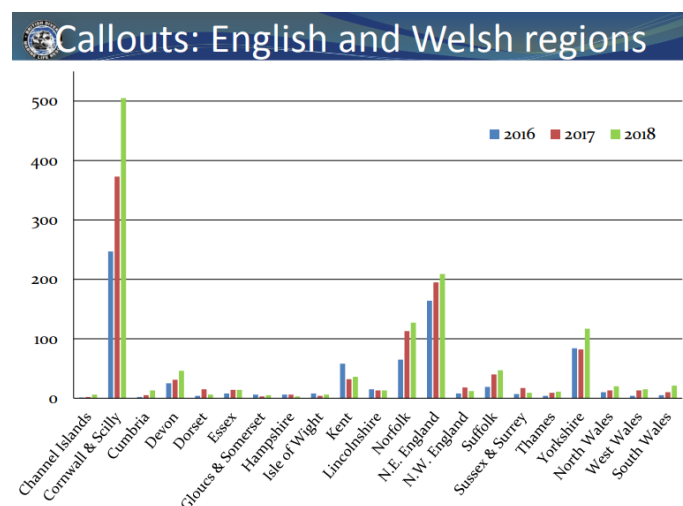


Figure 3. Overall number of BDMLR call-outs by region for 2016, 2017 and 2018

Recent training courses

This year Cornwall has hosted three BDMLR 'Marine Mammal Medic' training courses. This included one at 'Morwork space' in Newquay (who very kindly donated us their event space at no cost) where we ran a course specifically for veterinary surgeons and Registered veterinary nurses. All three courses were a great success and we are pleased to have a new group of medics in our ranks in the South-West. For anyone who is interested in becoming a '**Marine Mammal Medic**', you can view upcoming courses on our website (www.bdmlr.org.uk) and Facebook page (@BDMLR) or call head office on 01825 765546 for more information.

- **Alexandra Pearce-Broomhead**

Septimus the Seal – his land adventures

For a marine mammal, Septimus has been having some extraordinary land based adventures.

Septimus is Cornwall Seal Group Research Trust's (CSGRT's) 2.4m long adult male grey seal skeleton who was known to us when he was alive, as he died, decomposed and then got rebuilt into an articulated skeleton. This was made possible by a number of substantial donations, one of which was generously gifted by the Cornwall Mammal Group. Since picking Septimus up from Derek Frampton (taxidermist and model maker) in London, Septimus has had a very steep learning curve as he has been introduced to the world of humans.

After his public launch events at Cornwall Council's Leadership Team meeting and the University of Exeter's Marine and Ecology Conservation Network Conference, Septimus has gone on tour! As well as visiting Cornwall Mammal Group with his assistants Rob Wells and Sue Sayer, Septimus has been the centre of attention at other talks given to Cornwall Wildlife Trust (CWT) Marine Stranding Network Forum, Looe Marine Conservation Group, CWT's Seaquest Conference, Rame Wildlife Group, British Divers Marine Life Rescue's Marine Mammal Medic vet and vet nurse course and Friends of Fowey Estuary.

Septimus has attracted his own exhibition and he is now the main attraction of CSGRT's pop up mobile Marine Centre. Septimus has begun his pilot 'pop up' tour, participating in Mousehole Sealebration, Penryn Bioblitz, Cornwall Skills Show at the County Show Ground, Falmouth Institute of Photography and Cornwall Wildlife Trust's Wildfest events.

His latest appearance was a rather exciting two week holiday 'special exhibition' thanks to Mevagissey Museum. Rob Wells and Mevagissey Museum volunteer Joan coordinated two weeks of activities for Septimus to keep him entertained whilst he was away and acted as his body guards. Lots of excited school children flocked to see our celebrity seal Septimus and to learn all about his life and death. He helped them learn all about skeletal anatomy, how to survive a life in a marine environment shared with people and about the issues he had to overcome in his all too short life. Septimus has grown into his new celebrity role as the public face for a range of resources and activities suitable for all ages and abilities working together. If you would like Septimus' Roadshow to come and visit you, please do get in touch with his assistant sue@cornwallsealgroup.co.uk.



Septimus being protected by Storm Troopers at Cornwall Skills Show. Image © Rose Summers for CSGRT

Like all top celebrities, Septimus has had commitments to fulfil in terms of photo shoots. Keen to help local students, Septimus agreed to be the focus for a day long lighting workshop for photography students at Falmouth University. This was followed by having his own exhibition room for three days at the Institute of Photography at Penryn, showcasing his amazing 360° interactive model that Rose Summers has generated from her 3d scan. Here Septimus was delighted to meet some of his idols – legendary local photographers Dave Chapman, Jane Morgan and Andrew Cooper (ex BBC Natural History Unit). Most recently his profile has been further enhanced as Adrian Brown (a commercial photographer) spent two days with Rose focusing

entirely on Septimus (literally) to capture top quality images of him from every angle as a whole and some stunningly beautiful close up abstract photos.

Septimus has been overwhelmed by the huge level of interest, support, warmth and positivity that he has encountered from everyone he has met and would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has made it possible for him to have all these wonderful 'after death' experiences.

Next stop later this month.... Bristol 'We the Curious' Science Museum and later in the year, Septimus gets a well earned change of scene as he heads back offshore out to Lundy to help celebrate their 50th anniversary of their Marine Protected Area. Wonder if he has been there before?

CSGRT are now planning to get Septimus an immortal friend in the form of Augusta. Augusta was the first white coated pup of the 2018 season, who was sadly she was just a few days old when she was washed up dead at Gwithian beach. Quick thinking by Dave Jarvis alerted CSGRT to her plight and she is now decomposing ready for her re-articulation next year once sufficient funds are available. Septimus will no longer be alone.

Keep up to date with Septimus' adventures with **#Septimussomesal**.



Septimus supervising and keeping the children enthralled with Rob and Joan at Mevagissey Museum. Image © Joan Summers for CSGRT

Getting involved – How you can help

1/ The CMG AGM this year will be celebrating the work and interests of Vic Simpson, so strong otter-y theme. At the AGM we like to recognise the work of an individual outside the core CMG committee who has gone above and beyond in achieving or promoting the aims of the Group, which are: –

- *Raise awareness and understanding of mammals and their threats*
- *Encourage recording and study of mammals in Cornwall*
- *Produce an up to date **Mammals of Cornwall Atlas***
- *Provide training to identify and survey mammals*
- *Promote conservation of mammals and their habitats*
- *Bring together like-minded people to share interests and skills*

If you have any suggestions for the recipient of this award then please let Dave Groves or any other committee member know and the committee will discuss the award before the AGM.

2/ Hedgehogs – we now have 20 or so hedgehog tracking tunnels currently stored at Allet. These are available to any paid-up member to borrow and use to check for hogs in their vicinity. The tunnels are easy to use and cheap to use and do not involve any stress to the hogs or handling – please contact Laura Guy-Wilkinson at Cornwall Wildlife Trust if you wish to try them out.

3/ Otters – the Coastal Otter Project has been collecting spraint now for almost a year and we have nearly 200 samples. If you are one of our lovely volunteers then it would be great if you could make one last push so that we can carry out the analysis before the end of the year. If you are not currently collecting spraint for us and would like to get involved then please contact Dave Groves or Rebecca Smith.

4/ Newsletter - We are always looking for new voices to be heard in our newsletter. If you have been involved in any Cornwall mammal related research, or maybe you have a regular visitor to your garden or one of your favourite walks? Perhaps you just have a keen interest in the wildlife around us and their ecology or maybe you're an aspiring writer or photographer? Whatever your motivation and inspiration, if you think you have something that the other members of the Cornwall mammal group are interested in reading, then please send all articles or credited images to Angie Nash at angie@panashadventures.com

Cornwall Bat Group also has a number of events on this summer. The National Trust events are open to the public so best to book on early.

| Date | Details | Location | Leader | Contact Info |
|--|---|-----------------|---------------------|--|
| Saturday 13 th and Sunday the 14 th July | Portmellon Valley Bioblitz | Portmellon | Three Bays Wildlife | A free event, for any information please consult the facebook page https://en-gb.facebook.com/ThreeBaysWildlife/ |
| Wednesday 24 th July | Argal Reservoir Bat Walk with the South West Lakes Trust: | Argal Reservoir | Beth Cross | Booking via Beth Cross at bcross@swlakestrust.org.uk or 01209860301 |
| Wednesday 24 th July | Bat Night at Pentire Head, near Polzeath 8.30pm until late Join National Trust rangers for an evening all about bats. Starting with a talk about British bats, we will then see and hear greater horseshoe bats emerge after sunset from old mine workings. Talk starts promptly at 8.30pm. Bring a chair or rug to sit on, warm clothes, and a torch is useful. Bat capes optional. £3 per person | Polzeath | Sarah Stevens | Booking is essential as the date may change due to unfavourable weather. 01208 863046 |
| Saturday 27 th July | National Nathusius Pipistrelle Project: Harp trapping with acoustic lures as part of a National Project to find the Nathusius pipistrelle. Surveys will normally commence an hour before sunset and continue for at least three hours after sunset (likely more). | Argal Reservoir | Sam Smith | Please Contact Sam Smith on 07919923468 or samma_smith@hotmail.co.uk for more information or to confirm attendance |

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| | All welcome for all or part of the evening. | | | |
| Friday 2 nd August | <p>Bat night at Stowe Barton and Coombe Mill (near Bude):</p> <p>An introductory talk about bats over a cup of coffee or juice at Stowe Barton followed by a walk through Coombe Valley with bat detectors hearing and seeing some of the bats which roost in this area. Children with adult supervision welcome.</p> <p>Organised by Cornwall Wildlife Trust Bude Group in conjunction with National Trust and Cornwall Bat Group. £3 per person. 8pm till late.</p> | Meet at the National Trust office at Stowe Barton, Kilhampton, near Bude EX2 3 9JW | Sarah Stevens and Rob Robinson | Booking essential: Rob Robinson 01288 321236 or binsrob@aol.com |
| Wednesday 7 th August | <p>Bat Night at Pentire Head, near Polzeath 8.30pm until late, Join National Trust rangers for an evening all about bats. Starting with a talk about British bats, we will then see and hear greater horseshoe bats emerge after sunset from old mine workings. Talk starts promptly at 8.30pm. Bring a chair or rug to sit on, warm clothes, and a torch is useful. Bat capes optional.</p> | Polzeath | Sarah Stevens | Booking is essential as the date may change due to unfavourable weather. 01208 863046 |

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| Thursday 8 th August | Penrose Bat walk: A walk around the Penrose National Trust Property using bat detectors | Penrose National Trust | Rick Payne | £3 per person, booking is essential. Please Contact Sam Smith on 07919923468 or samma_smith@hotmail.co.uk to join |
| Saturday 10 th August | National Nathusius Pipistrelle Project: Harp trapping with acoustic lures as part of a National Project to find the Nathusius pipistrelle. Surveys will normally commence an hour before sunset and continue for at least three hours after sunset (likely more). All welcome for all or part of the evening. | Loe Pool | Sam Smith | Please Contact Sam Smith on 07919923468 or samma_smith@hotmail.co.uk for more information or to confirm attendance |
| Wednesday 14 th August | Argal Reservoir Bat Walk with South West Lakes Trust: | Argal Reservoir | Beth Cross | Booking via Beth Cross at bcross@swlakestrust.org.uk or 01209860301 |
| Wednesday 22 nd August | Penrose Bat walk: A walk around the Penrose National Trust Property using bat detectors | Penrose National Trust | Rick Payne | £3 per person, booking is essential. Please Contact Sam Smith on 07919923468 or samma_smith@hotmail.co.uk to join |
| Saturday 24 th August | National Nathusius Pipistrelle Project: Harp trapping with acoustic lures as part of a National Project to find the Nathusius pipistrelle. Surveys will normally commence an hour before sunset and continue for at least three hours after sunset (likely more). All welcome for all or part of the evening. | Argal Reservoir | Sam Smith | Please Contact Sam Smith on 07919923468 or samma_smith@hotmail.co.uk for more information or to confirm attendance |

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|--------------------------------------|--|-----------------|---------------|---|
| Saturday 7 th August | National Nathusius Pipistrelle Project: Harp trapping with acoustic lures as part of a National Project to find the Nathusius pipistrelle. Surveys will normally commence an hour before sunset and continue for at least three hours after sunset (likely more). All welcome for all or part of the evening. | Loe Pool | Sam Smith | Please Contact Sam Smith on 07919923468 or samma_smith@hotmail.co.uk for more information or to confirm attendance |
| Saturday 21 st August | National Nathusius Pipistrelle Project: Harp trapping with acoustic lures as part of a National Project to find the Nathusius pipistrelle. Surveys will normally commence an hour before sunset and continue for at least three hours after sunset (likely more). All welcome for all or part of the evening. | Argal Reservoir | Sam Smith | Please Contact Sam Smith on 07919923468 or samma_smith@hotmail.co.uk for more information or to confirm attendance |
| Friday 20 th September | CBG Meeting: A meeting for CBG members to come and discuss any group business and socialise. New members very welcome | CWT HQ, Allet | CBG Committee | Please contact Rick Payne at cbgcommunicationofficer@yahoo.co.uk |
| Saturday 5 th October | National Nathusius Pipistrelle Project: Harp trapping with acoustic lures as part of a National Project to find the Nathusius | Loe Pool | Sam Smith | Please Contact Sam Smith on 07919923468 or samma_smith@hotmail.co.uk for more information or to confirm attendance |

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| | <p>pipistrelle. Surveys will normally commence an hour before sunset and continue for at least three hours after sunset (likely more). All welcome for all or part of the evening.</p> | | | |
| <p>Saturday 19th October</p> | <p>National Nathusius Pipistrelle Project: Harp trapping with acoustic lures as part of a National Project to find the Nathusius pipistrelle. Surveys will normally commence an hour before sunset and continue for at least three hours after sunset (likely more). All welcome for all or part of the evening.</p> | <p>Argal Reservoir</p> | <p>Sam Smith</p> | <p>Please Contact Sam Smith on 07919923468 or samma_smith@hotmail.co.uk for more informat</p> |