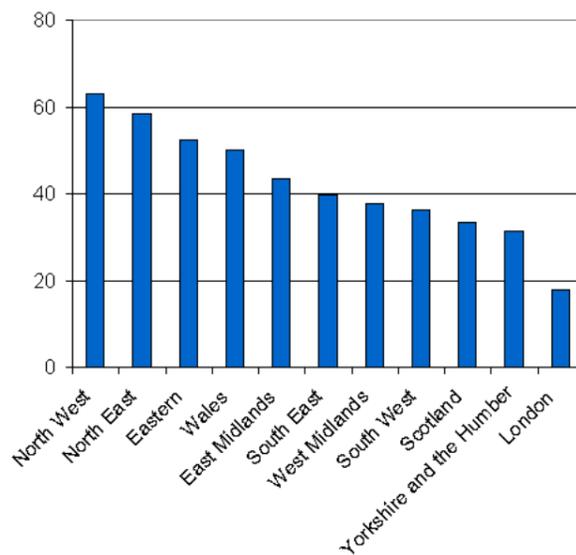


Figure 4 The percentage of sites in different regions of the UK, which recorded muntjac deer (pink) and hedgehog (blue).

England, particularly in the east, and are present in the south and in Wales. North of the Humber, their distribution is patchy but reaches close to the Scottish border. The overall proportion of sites recording muntjac has increased since the beginning of *Living with Mammals* and this ties in with other surveys, which indicate an increasing population.

Hedgehogs appear more prevalent in the north and eastern regions of England and scarcest in London (figure 4). In comparison, this difference may be because London is a particularly urbanised region. Though hedgehogs can do well in urban gardens, if these are isolated from each other, with few 'green corridors' linking different sites, such gardens may be an inaccessible habitat for hedgehogs. A fuller analysis of the survey's data will hopefully shed light on which features of sites encourage these visitors.



A partnership

There are about sixty terrestrial wild mammal species in the UK. Many are predators, near the top of food chains, and their presence is an important indicator of the health of the environment. Surveying all of them is beyond the resources of any single organisation. The efforts of many of the academic groups, government agencies and NGOs involved are linked through the Tracking Mammals Partnership (TMP), funded by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. At the heart of the Partnership are many thousands of volunteers, and it is their enthusiasm and experience on which the TMP relies. The TMP website (www.trackingmammals.org) is an excellent overview of mammal monitoring in the UK.

The Bat Conservation Trust runs a number of surveys as part of the National Bat Monitoring Programme, and is collaborating with MTUK on a *Bats and Roadside Mammals* project. Information about the surveys can be found at: www.bats.org.uk.

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TRACKING
Mammals
 PARTNERSHIP

Living with Mammals Survey Update 2006



LIVING WITH MAMMALS SURVEY

DECEMBER 2006

Spring arrived a little late this year. The average temperature for the first four months of the year was the lowest that it has been since 2001, and the appearance of many insect and plant species, such as the red-tailed bumblebee, peacock butterfly and dog's tooth violet, was later than in recent years. But despite the cold winds that persisted into April, many hundreds of volunteers joined in *Living with Mammals* to survey local green spaces. Our thanks go to everyone who took part, for all their efforts and enthusiasm. Thank you!

Survey coverage

Over the course of the survey, *Living with Mammals* amassed weekly records from over seven hundred sites across the UK (figure 1), stretching from the Orkney Islands to Cornwall and from County Antrim to Norfolk. The proportion of records from the different countries was similar to that for those collected in the BBC *Springwatch Survey*, with the majority of sites (and the most per capita) coming from England.

Nearly four-fifths of sites (544) were gardens (figure 2), while about one in twenty (34 sites) were common land or pasture, and one in twenty-five (26) were recreational spaces (parks, playing fields or golf courses).

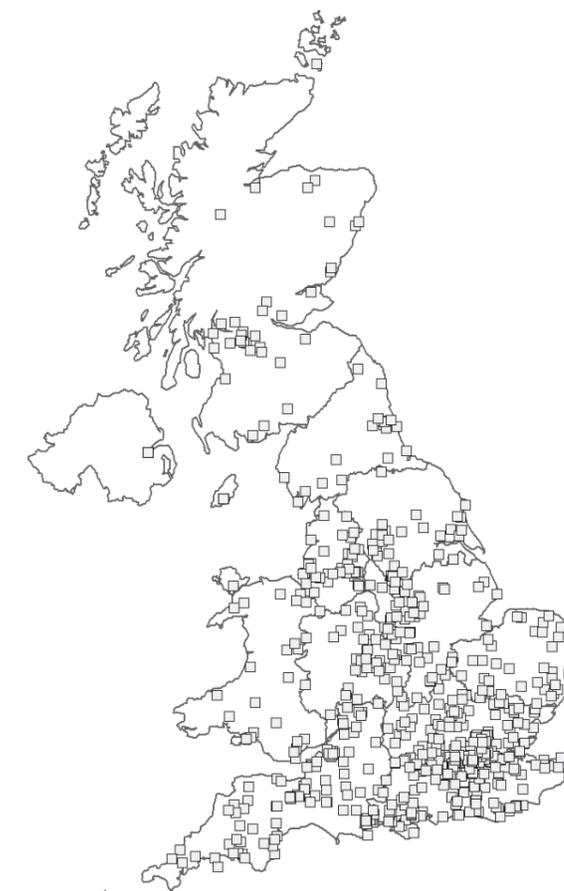


Figure 1 The distribution of survey sites in 2006. The 'Government Office Regions' for England are outlined.

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A common pipistrelle. Hugh Clark, courtesy of the Bat Conservation Trust

Species recorded

Twenty-six species were identified in the survey, as well as groups of species such as bats or voles. Those of conservation concern are shown below (table 1). These are species that conservationists believe should be monitored where possible, and include hedgehog, otter and three deer species, our native red and roe, and fallow. In all, 556 sites (79 %) recorded 'Species of Conservation Concern'. The presence of these species around our homes and places of work blurs the distinction between the built and natural environment. They highlight the value of the built

Species of Conservation Concern	Number of sites
Bat species	395
Hedgehog	277
Shrew species	133
Badger	129
Roe deer	65
Brown hare	49
Weasel	28
Stoat	22
Red squirrel	17
Otter	9
Water vole	9
Fallow deer	6
Polecat	5
Hazel dormouse	3
Red deer	3
Pine marten	1
Seal	1

Table 1 The number of sites recording 'Species of Conservation Concern'. Those highlighted in pink are priority species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

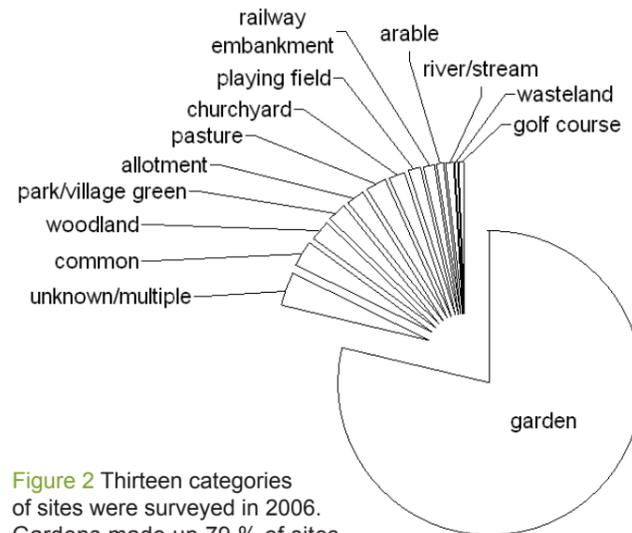


Figure 2 Thirteen categories of sites were surveyed in 2006. Gardens made up 79 % of sites. Private gardens collectively cover about 270,000 hectares (667,000 acres) in Britain and make up the largest urban green space.

environment to biodiversity, and the need to ally conservation and urban development.

One such flagship species, not ordinarily associated with the built environment, is the otter. Otters were identified at nine sites this year, all of them gardens. With the exception of one site, this shy animal was recognised from signs alone. Improvements in water quality and in riverbank habitats have helped the species to spread, prompting hopes that otters may become a more frequent sight even in urban landscapes. Manchester City Council's environment office recently predicted that otters will be living in the River Mersey in the next five years, following the return of salmon to the river; and in September, the first wild otter to be found in central London in more than a hundred years was reported. The young male animal was found dead in Wapping and had probably travelled down the River Lee.

The proportion of sites recording particular species is shown in figure 3. Each year that the survey runs, so the data it collects become more valuable, revealing long-term trends in how populations are changing.

Although still too soon to say a lot about trends, an interesting feature of the survey's findings to date is the apparent year-on-year increase in the number of sites that are home to bats. The most abundant British bat, and one found in urban environments, is the common pipistrelle, and this rise mirrors that found in a recent survey by the Bat Conservation Trust. The survey recorded the presence or absence of pipistrelles in randomly

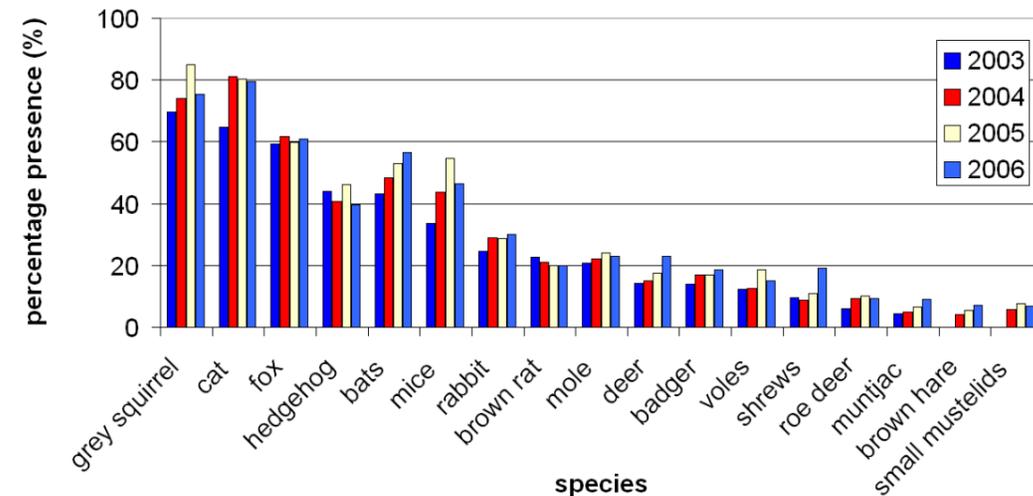


Figure 3 The percentage of sites at which particular species were recorded in the four years of the survey to date.

chosen 1km squares across the UK. In 2005, 212 sites were surveyed and 186 (88 %) were positive for common pipistrelles. Between 1998 and 2005, the trend has shown an average annual increase of eight percent, which is reflected in the results from *Living with Mammals*.

That the different surveys show similar changes is very encouraging, and "cross-referencing" surveys in this way adds to their strength in informing conservation policy.

One other sighting of a rare species this year deserves a mention: that of a panther, which was spotted in Buckinghamshire. Eye-witness accounts of big cats around the UK are surprisingly frequent. Over 2,000 sightings were reported in the fifteen months from April 2004, and Milton Keynes has a history of sightings. The British Big Cats Society has gathered evidence of at least 23 releases of big cats into the wild since 1976 but whether big cats are definitely on the prowl in the neighbourhood remains uncertain...

Regional differences

Conservation efforts are often funded at the level of Government Office Regions, administrative areas within the UK countries. The nine regions in England, together with Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland were used to look at differences in the results across the UK.

Variation in the proportion of 'positive' sites (those at which a particular species was spotted) in different regions might reflect either the edge of a species' range or a difference in the sorts of features that sites commonly have in different regions. Muntjac deer for example (figure 4) are widespread in twelve 'core' counties in central



A grey squirrel. Dave Bevan