

Survey findings: mustelids

Small mustelids, such as stoats and weasels, are only rarely found in urban areas – about one in twenty sites recorded them this year – but they are spotted at sites that support thriving populations of small mammals, such as ones near to a rabbit warren or next to grain or timber stores.

Badgers do well in urban areas: cities such as London, Bristol, Bath and Birmingham have sizable numbers of badgers, and a study of setts in Birmingham and the Black Country found that they were typically in green suburban areas and often close to railways and canals.

As urban areas continue to expand, badgers can become unwitting town-dwellers. Even in new surroundings, however, they can insist on the right of way. Badgers stick to a network of paths that lead to foraging areas and between the entrances of a sett and when these routes meet a man-made obstacle, such as a road or a stone wall, badgers will often just keep going.



Picture by Sheila Paterson

Survey findings: bats

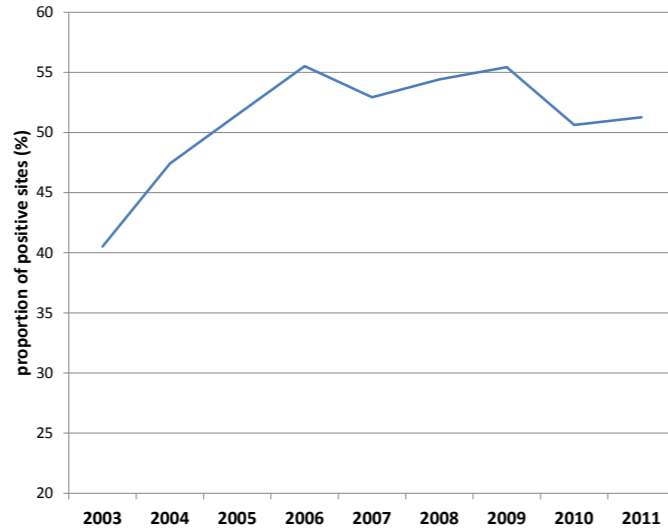


Figure 4 (above) The percentage proportion of sites recording bat species in each year of the survey. Most of the records are likely to be of common and soprano pipistrelles, which, along with brown long-eared bats, are the most urbanite bat species. The upward trend mirrors that reported for pipistrelles in the National Bat Monitoring Programme (www.bats.org.uk/pages/nbmp.html).

The future

Next year, *Living with Mammals* is ten years old and we hope the occasion will be marked with even more volunteers taking part, building on the success of everyone who has contributed so much already to the survey. The built environment affects our health and wellbeing, and understanding the biodiversity that we share it with, enriches it for everyone.

Britain's Mammals: a concise guide

Describing 64 wild mammal species in Britain and around its coast, along with species that are now extinct, *Britain's Mammals* gives key facts about identification, natural history, population size and distribution. "Great value for money" – *BBC Wildlife Magazine*

It can be ordered for £9.99 with FREE p&p by calling: 020 7498 4533 or at our online shop: www.ptes.org/shop

The state of Britain's hedgehogs 2011

An outline of the BTO report produced this summer that analysed the hedgehog data from five surveys including PTES' *Mammals on Roads* and *Living with Mammals* surveys. It can be downloaded free at: www.ptes.org/publications



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people's trust for
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Living with Mammals



Survey Update 2011

Thank you for taking part in *Living with Mammals* this year. Your observations (along with those of over six-hundred other people) are a huge contribution towards understanding the wild mammal populations we live so close to. The findings might not look much, summed up as a point on a graph, but they continue the monitoring that underpins conservation. Without you, our knowledge and efforts would be a lot poorer. Thank you!

Urban wildlife is important: being aware of the wildlife in gardens and the green spaces around us has a positive effect on our wellbeing – we recover from illness more quickly and feel happier – and the greater the diversity of species, the greater are the benefits. The monetary value of this benefit was estimated earlier this year by the UK National Ecosystem Assessment and amounted to £300 per person each year. Recording our urban wildlife has a very real value.

More people than ever reported their sightings online this year and in total almost 200 people took part for the first time. Next year is the tenth year of the survey and we hope everyone involved so far will be able to help us celebrate the milestone and an extraordinary achievement.

From the results of *Living with Mammals* and other surveys, a conservative estimate is that a quarter of the hedgehog population has been lost in the last ten years. The focus of work now is to find out how urban habitats and the wider landscape can be made to support more hedgehogs.

Survey findings: hedgehogs

One species that has been on the radar in conservation for some time is the hedgehog. There has never been a national census of hedgehog numbers but several surveys (including PTES' *Mammals on Roads* survey) have collected hedgehog records and in 2007 the species was added to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. The long-term population trend though was largely unknown.



Picture by Steve Heliczar

Two of the surveys – *Living with Mammals* and the British Trust for Ornithology's *Garden BirdWatch* – collect information about urban sites. The data were analysed earlier this year by the BTO (for PTES and the British Hedgehog Preservation Society) and both showed a decline: between 2007 and 2010, the *Garden BirdWatch* showed an average annual decline of 10.7 per cent; while *Living with Mammals* between 2003 and 2009 showed an annual decline of 4.7 per cent. The proportion of sites recording hedgehogs this year was higher than that for the last two years but the trend is still downward (Figure 1).

Gardens and urban areas have been thought to be a possible refuge for hedgehogs, whose habitat in the wider landscape has been lost as farming has become more intensive, but the evidence suggests hedgehogs are under pressure closer to home as well.

Around six in every seven sites this year were gardens (Figure 2) and the combination of habitats that are found in gardens can suit hedgehogs down to the ground. Lawns provide an ideal foraging habitat for earthworms, ground beetles and insect larvae; and compost heaps, herbaceous borders and hedges can provide shelter. The average size of a British garden is about 160 square metres (equivalent to an area 42 feet square) and those in *Living with Mammals* are fairly typical (a little over a half are larger than 200 square meters). The home ranges of hedgehogs however are at least five hectares for females and three times that for males, larger than any individual garden. Hedgehogs typically travel a kilometre in a night, so conservation needs to be on a neighbourhood-scale. *Hedgehog Street* is championing this idea and looking for volunteers to encourage neighbours to ensure gardens are accessible and habitats are joined up. More information about the project is at: www.hedgehogstreet.org.

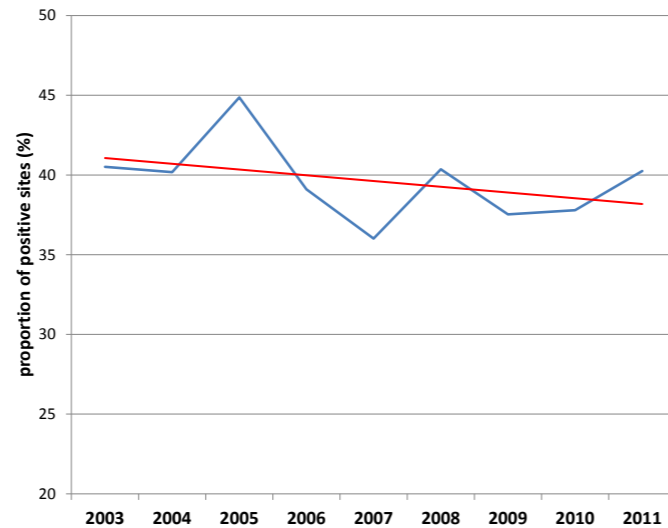
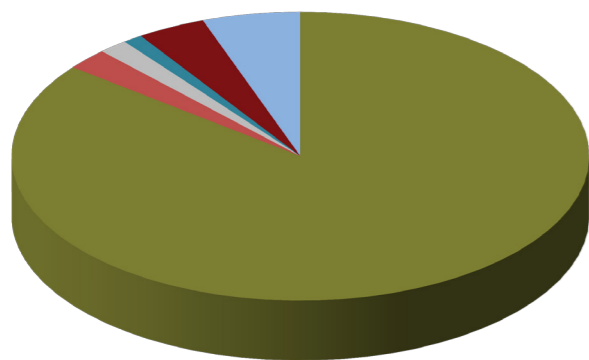


Figure 1 (above) The percentage proportion of sites recording hedgehogs in each year of the survey. The red line indicates the long-term population trend underlying the year-to-year differences.

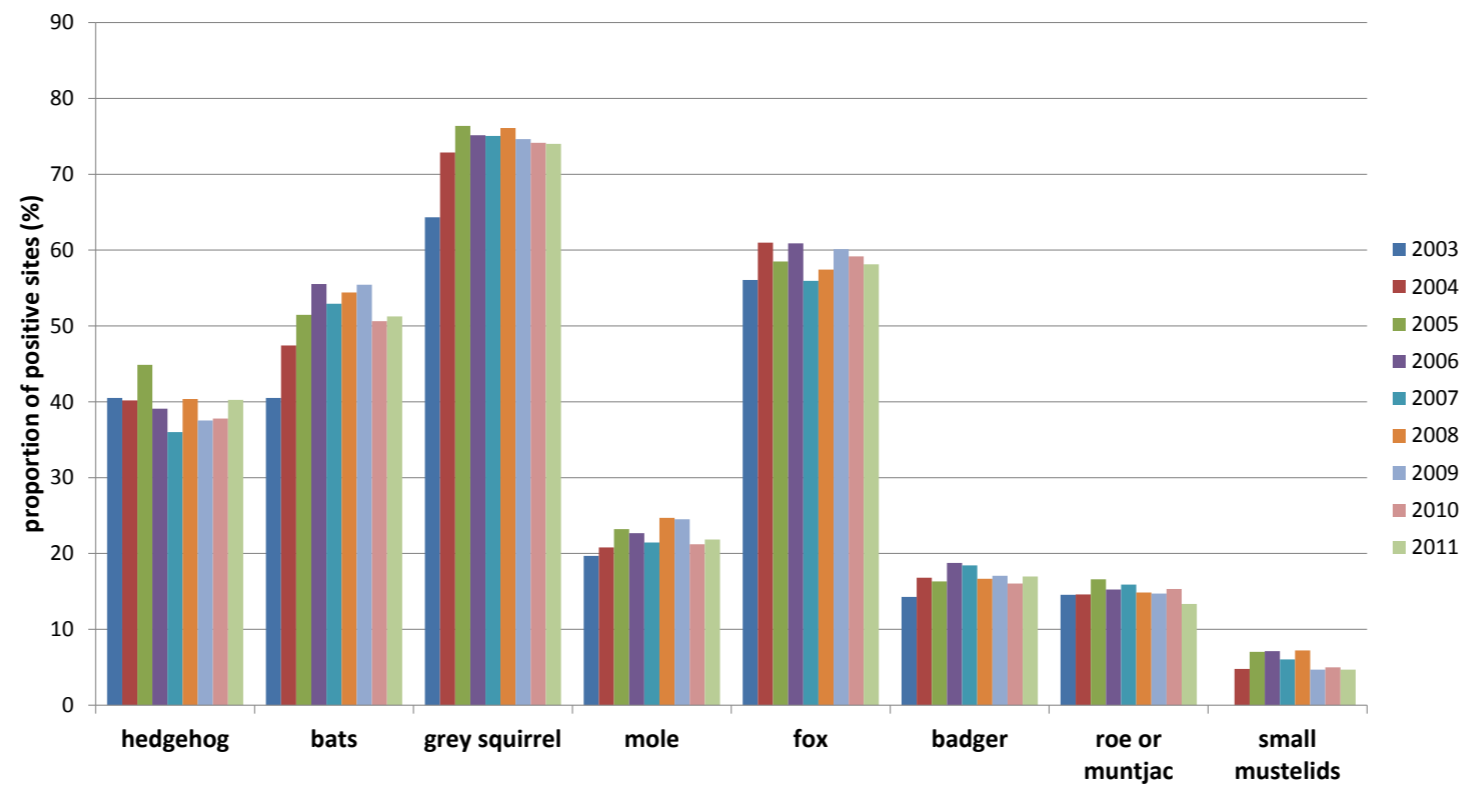


Figure 2 (left) The relative proportion of types of site surveyed in 2011. Most of the sites (86%) were gardens. Common ground, derelict sites, railway embankments and river banks (grouped together here as 'unmanaged' sites) accounted for about one in twenty-five sites; and recreational ground (parks, playing fields and golf courses) made up about one in every forty.

Survey findings: moles

Stories of an “explosion in mole numbers” perennially pop up in the press: each year the story has it that the ban of the strychnine in 2006, which had been used to kill moles, has led to the population soaring as testified to by the increase in the call-out of registered mole catchers. The problem with such reports is that there is no real evidence behind them. The number of sites recording molehills in *Living with Mammals* has remained more or less constant since the survey began in 2003 (Figure 3) and no surveys of the wider countryside have been carried out since the ban.

The increase in call-outs is because the 3,000 or so farmers and landowners that had been licenced to use strychnine have had to turn to alternative methods. Moles are frequently demonised but it is a moot point whether their reputation as pests is deserved or whether the measures used to control them are justified. The control of a native wild mammal should be informed by sound science not unsupported claims, which is why *Living with Mammals* and monitoring are so important.

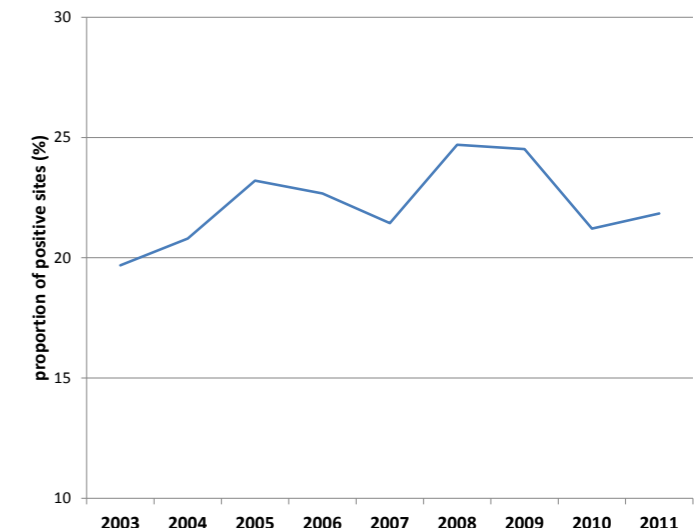


Figure 3 (above) The percentage proportion of sites recording moles in each year of the survey.

Grey squirrels are among the most ubiquitous urban mammals, recorded at 74% of sites this year. To some people they are a nuisance – stripping bark from trees, making a noise in roof spaces or pilfering bulbs – but to others they have an undeniable appeal. They are adept problem-solvers and learn from watching their peers, particularly if it relates to finding a meal.



Survey findings (above) The percentage proportion of sites recording particular species or species groups (such as 'bats' or 'mice') in each year of the survey. The group 'small mustelids' is made up of records for stoats, weasels, mink, otters, pine martens and polecats. Records of polecats are very rare in the survey; otters are consistently reported though, turning up at eight sites in 2011.