



Mammals on Roads

Update

MAMMALS ON ROADS SURVEY

JULY 2009

The number of miles driven by cars collectively in Great Britain in 2007 was just over 400 billion – four followed by a tyre-track of eleven noughts. It is inescapable that our environmental footprint rests in large part on the pedals of our cars. Those miles though can be put to use in conservation, and the *Mammals on Roads* survey is doing just that.

Thank you to everyone who took part last year, recording sightings along roads the length and breadth of Britain, and who surveyed a total of 44 000 miles (70 800 km) on almost a thousand journeys. Your efforts are invaluable – without you, the survey simply couldn't be done.

Mammals on Roads continues to build on its past success, establishing that precious thing in conservation, a long-term dataset. Having comparable data that extend across many years allows us to spot changes that might be hidden by incidental variation – due to a particularly wet or dry summer one year for example – and to assess how populations are responding to a changing environment.

Better news for hedgehogs?

Hedgehogs were the focus of the survey in its first year (in its incarnation as the *National Hedgehog Survey*) and initial findings suggested a decline in numbers in England and Wales of about 7.5 percent per year.

If such a decline continued, the population would halve in just nine years. Findings from a similar study of hedgehog road casualties in the early 1990s suggested that numbers in some regions had declined by as much as 50 percent in the decade up to 2001. All in all, the picture was an alarming one.



Hedgehog counts have been a cause for concern in recent years, falling by a quarter across the UK as a whole in the first four years of the survey.

The situation may have improved a little, although it is too early to be sure. Counts since 2004 have crept up (figures 1 and 2, right and below), although they are still lower than that in the first year of the survey. Some areas such as Wales and the South West show steady increases while others are more variable.

The reasons for the slightly better news are not known yet: work looking at the effects of agri-environment schemes, funded by PTES, is underway and hedgehogs in urban areas, monitored in our *Living with Mammals* survey, continue to be of concern. A changing climate, with drier summers and warmer, wetter winters, may also put pressure on hedgehog populations. While the causes are still unclear, it is important not to take our eye off them and to continue to monitor them in the forthcoming decade.

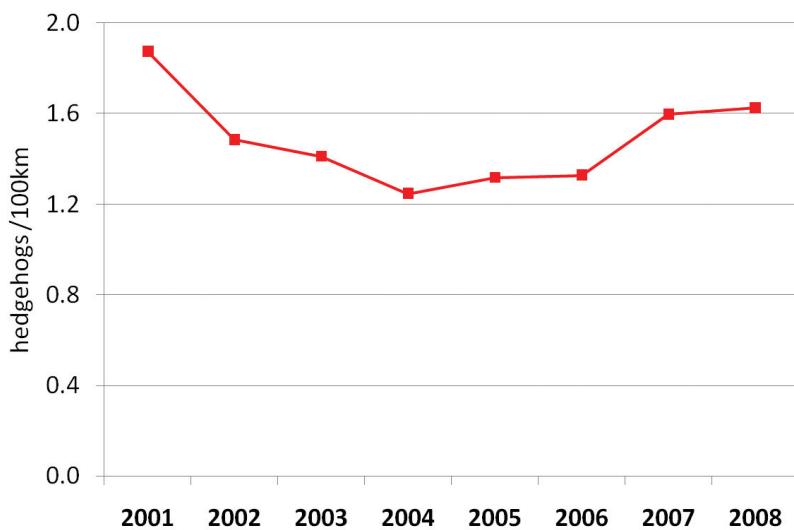
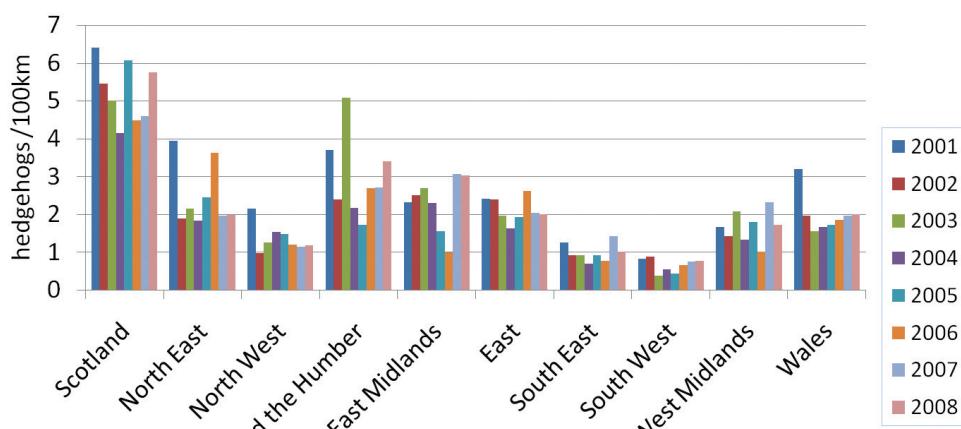


Figure 1 (above). The average number of hedgehogs recorded per 100km (62 miles) along journeys in England.

Figure 2 (left). Average hedgehog counts in Scotland, Wales and the English regions.

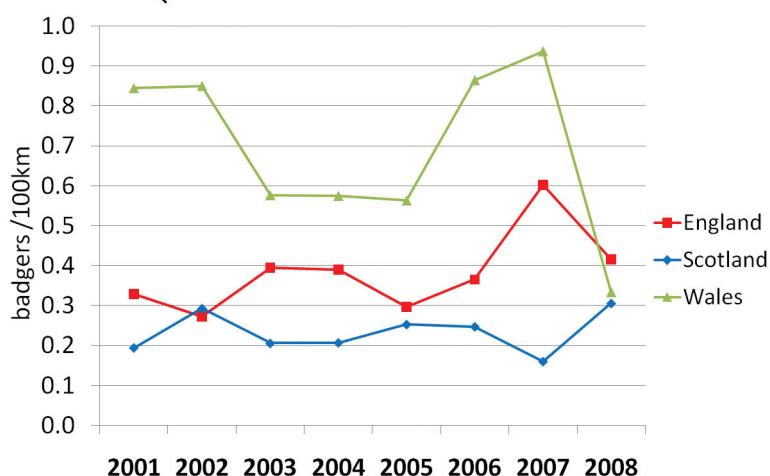


Figure 3. The average number of badgers recorded per 100km (62 miles) along journeys in England (red), Scotland (blue) and Wales (green).

Mammals on Roads online

This year *Mammals on Roads* will go online, allowing volunteers to record routes and sightings with interactive maps. As well as making the recording of data a lot easier, the new website should make its analysis easier and faster. If you have access to the internet, please give it a go ([at www.ptes.org/surveys](http://www.ptes.org/surveys)) and let us know what you think.

More information about mammal monitoring in the UK by government agencies and the many NGOs involved can be found at the Tracking Mammals Partnership website: www.trackingmammals.org.

Badgers

Badgers are our largest terrestrial carnivore and those in Britain differ from badgers in continental Europe in that they are more socially interactive and live in larger groups. In recent years, badgers have been the subject of much attention with regard to the spread of tuberculosis in cattle, and last year, based on the evidence presented by the Independent Scientific Group, Defra effectively ruled out a cull in England. Knowing how population numbers are changing therefore is paramount and *Mammals on Roads* is at the centre of efforts to achieve this.

Counts fluctuate from year to year (figure 3, left) but an overall trend is not apparent yet. The count in Wales in 2008 was markedly lower than that the previous year and, in light of the forthcoming cull in north Pembrokeshire announced by the Welsh Assembly, it will be interesting to see how counts change in the future.