



# Mammals on Roads Update



MAMMALS ON ROADS SURVEY

JULY 2010

**M**ammals on Roads is ten this year and marks an impressive decade of recording. Thank you to everyone who has taken part in that time and recorded over a distance, collectively, equivalent to circling the Earth thirteen times.

## New roads

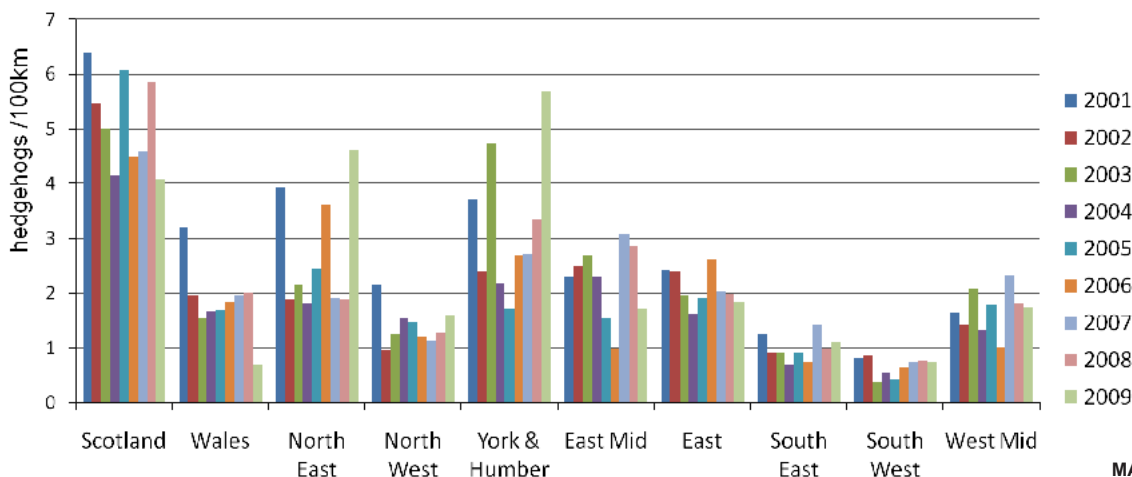
Since 2001, when the survey began as the *National Hedgehog Survey*, it has amassed a huge amount of information, and this year it goes online, in order to streamline the collection and processing of data. Although *Mammals on Roads* isn't the first survey to collect records using technology such as Bing Maps, it is one of the first to record routes – linear data rather than simple points – and was a finalist in the Microsoft DesignIT competition, which recognises innovative IT projects. If you have the opportunity, please have a look at the interactive website and record your sightings there.

And we're continuing to develop the survey, with the hope that it will appear as a mobile phone 'app' next year.

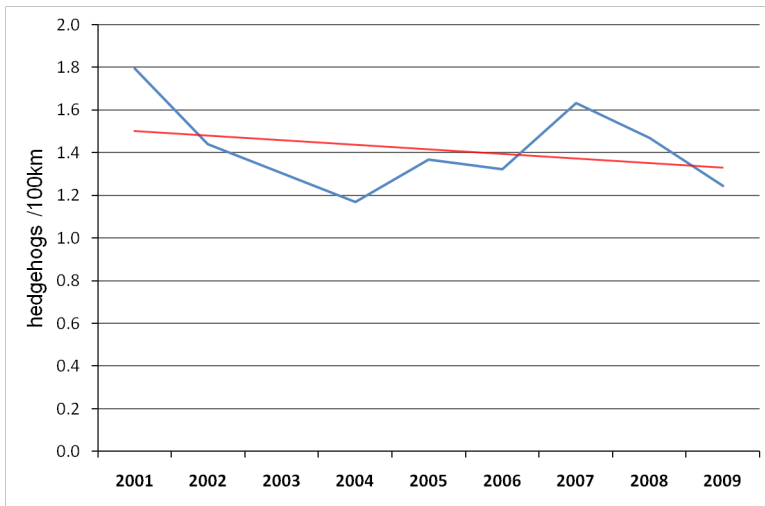
## Hedgehogs

Hedgehogs have been a cause for concern in recent years as there is growing evidence that their numbers are falling. The picture varies regionally – hedgehogs are more abundant in the north and east of the UK (figure 1 below) – but the indication is that across Britain as a whole, the population is declining. The count in 2009 was 31 percent lower than that in the first year of the survey (figure 2 overleaf). Some years are better than others, of course, which is why a dataset that extends over many years is so important: over the long-term, underlying trends can be spotted and it is these that we need to know.

Independently, records of hedgehog road casualties from a rescue centre in Tewkesbury show a similar 'rollercoaster' pattern of counts over the years, reassurance that the survey is detecting real changes.



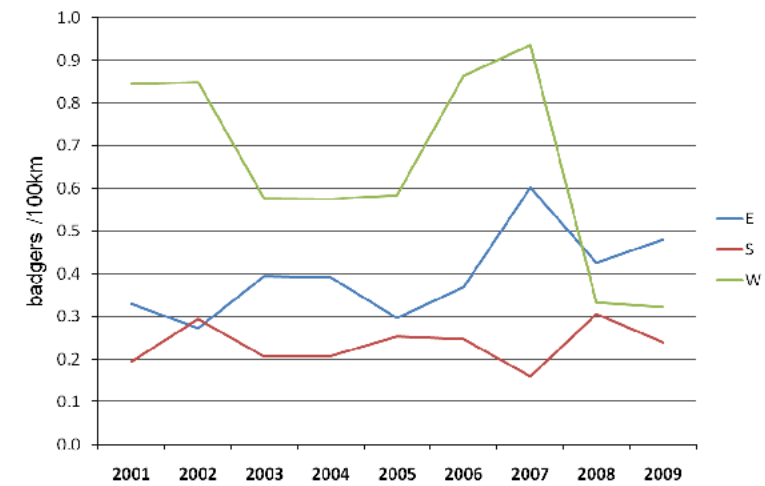
**Figure 1** Average hedgehog counts in Scotland, Wales and the English regions.



**Figure 2** The average number of hedgehogs recorded per 100km (62 miles) along journeys across all regions. The red line is an indication of the underlying trend.

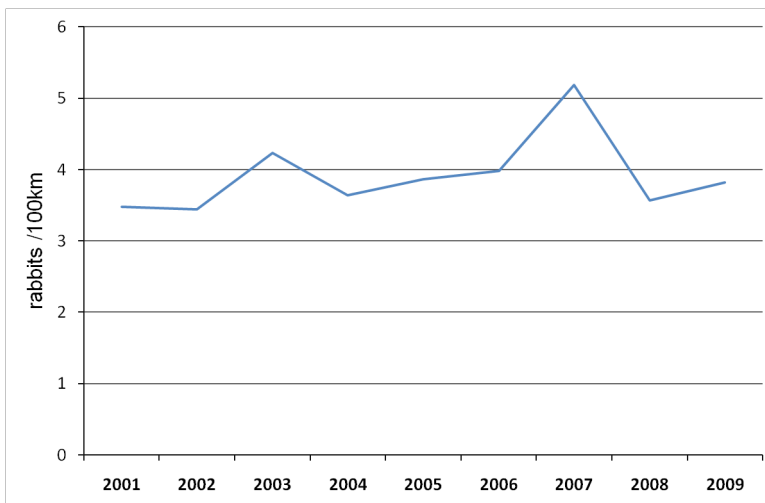
### Where to now?

In 2007, hedgehogs were designated a priority species as part of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, as a result of evidence in part from *Mammals on Roads*. Efforts are now underway, by PTES, the British Hedgehog Preservation Society and others, to ensure a strategy exists for their conservation. Work is planned for next year and much of it will rely on volunteer efforts.



**Figure 4 (above)** The average number of badgers recorded per 100km (62 miles) along journeys in England (*middle line*), Scotland (*bottom*) and Wales (*top*).

**Figure 5 (below)** The average number of rabbits recorded per 100km (62 miles) along journeys across all regions.



### Badgers

Despite Defra effectively ruling out a cull on the evidence presented by the Independent Scientific Group, badgers remain in the headlines. A cull in north Pembrokeshire, approved by the Welsh Assembly Government, and a proposed cull in Devon and Cornwall, stand opposed to evidence that destroying setts increases the transmission of TB to cattle. An appeal against the Welsh cull by the Badger Trust is going to be heard on 30th June. At bottom is how much we value our wild heritage. The policy to cull any wild mammal – our largest terrestrial carnivore in this case – has to be informed at the very least and monitoring is more important than ever in these times.

### Rabbits

Rabbits are sometimes overlooked; in fact, it was only in the aftermath of myxomatosis in the 1950s that their impact on the landscape was fully appreciated. Without them, woody seedlings and grasses increase in height and cover, and large areas of chalk grassland revert to scrub, losing an important habitat, and rabbits support populations of predators and scavengers too, such as stoats and foxes.

The myxomatosis epidemic is a reminder as well of how populations can crash almost overnight. In just two years, over 99 percent of the rabbits in the UK were killed by the virus. Today, Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease is a potential threat. Rabbit numbers are not easy to monitor over large areas, and *Mammals on Roads* is a successful way of doing just that.

## The Tracking Mammals Partnership

There are about sixty wild mammal species in the UK and monitoring all of them is beyond the resources of any single organisation. The efforts of many of the academic groups, government agencies and NGOs involved in survey work are linked through the Tracking Mammals Partnership. At its heart are the many thousands of volunteers whose enthusiasm and experience make the work possible.

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](http://www.trackingmammals.org).