



Mammals on Roads Update

M TRACKING
Mammals
PARTNERSHIP



MAMMALS ON ROADS SURVEY

JULY 2012

This year's **Diamond Jubilee** gives a perspective to the changes that Britain's wildlife has undergone. The two most frequently recorded species in *Mammals on Roads* – rabbits and hedgehogs – are a good example of how species' fortunes can change in less than a person's lifetime.

In 1952, there were around 100 million rabbits in Britain (40 million were culled each year for meat and fur); the following year, myxomatosis was introduced and by 1955, only one per cent remained. Since then, however, the population has recovered: in the 1980s, numbers were estimated to be 20 million and today there are almost twice as many as that (38 million).

The only estimate of hedgehog numbers in the early 1950s is a speculative guess of 36.5 million in arable and pastoral areas. Since then, it is likely that numbers have steadily declined. In 1995, the population in Great Britain was estimated to be 1.5 million, but over the last decade, counts of hedgehogs in *Mammals on Roads* have fallen by a fifth.

A lot can change in a short time – which means surveys, and the commitment of everyone involved, are essential to conservation. Thank you for all your efforts and support in previous years. I very much hope you can continue to take part in the survey and to help us

with this valuable work. Indeed, the value of veteran surveyors was highlighted in an analysis of the survey last year by the British Trust of Ornithology (BTO) that looked at changing hedgehog numbers. If different routes are surveyed each year, more than 800 are needed to detect a national decline of 10 per cent over 5-10 years; if the routes are repeated, however, only a quarter as many are needed to detect the same fall. Driving the same route (or part of it) makes the survey more powerful in picking up the changes in populations. **So, if you do drive a regular route each year, please make it one of those in the survey – thank you!**

Hedgehog numbers

Last year's *State of Britain's Hedgehogs* report, based on the analysis by the BTO and commissioned jointly by PTES and the British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS), highlighted a decline in hedgehog numbers from survey records between 2001 and 2009, and the most recent data do nothing to allay concerns (Figure 1 overleaf). Counts in 2010 and 2011 were the lowest for any year since the survey began in 2001.

Work is currently underway, funded by PTES and BHPS, to understand the causes of the decline, which is apparent (from *Mammals on Roads* and other surveys) in both the wider landscape and urban gardens.

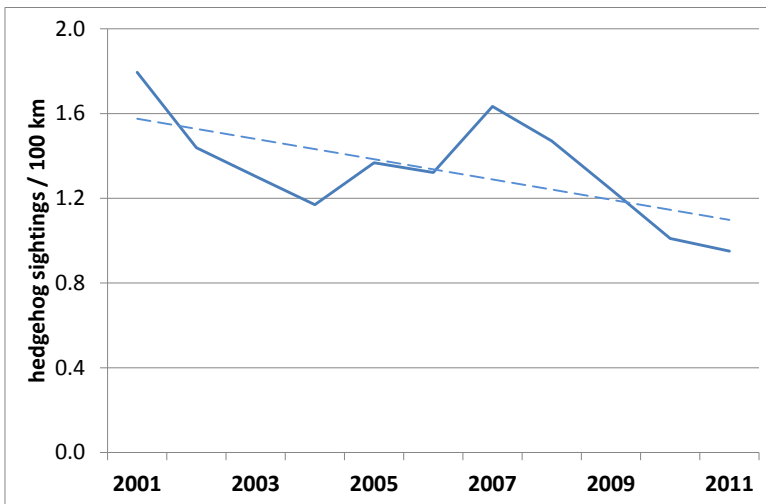


Figure 1 (left, top) The average number of hedgehogs recorded per 100km (62 miles) along journeys in Great Britain. The dashed line is an indication of the overall trend.

Figure 2 (middle) The average number of badgers (red) and rabbits (blue) recorded per 100km and 10km respectively along journeys in Great Britain. The dashed lines are indications of the trend for each species.

Figure 3 (bottom) The average number of records per 100km of fox, grey squirrel, brown hare and rat along journeys in Great Britain.

Rabbits and badgers

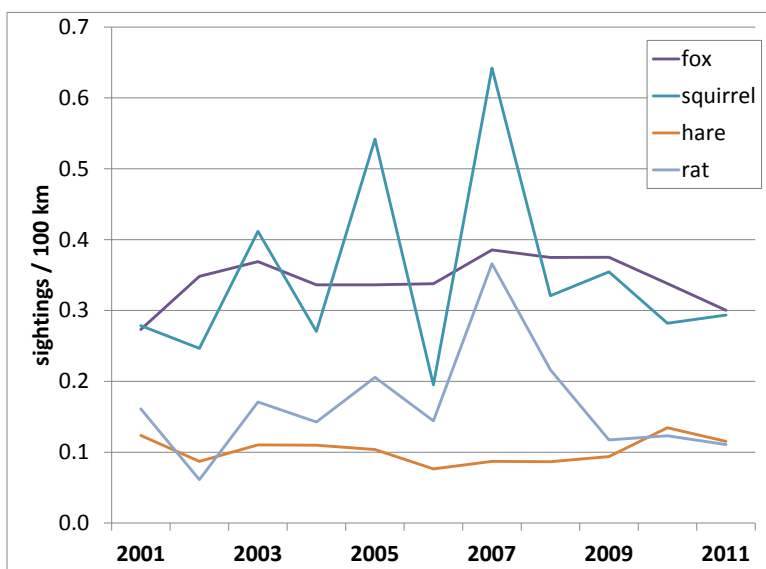
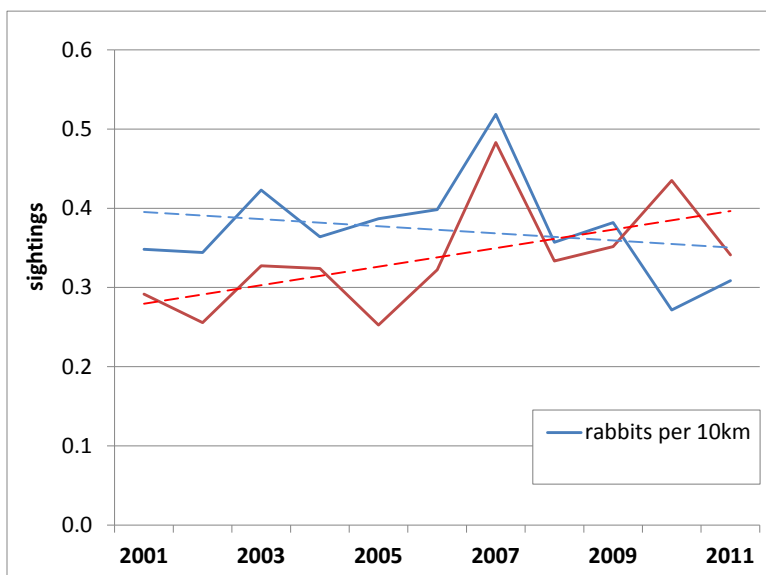
Changes in counts of rabbits and badgers have been less drastic over the period of the survey. Although rabbit numbers have increased over the last twenty-five years or so, more recently there is evidence of a decline and this is shown in the trend of counts in *Mammals on Roads* (indicated by the dashed blue line in Figure 2, opposite). Rabbits are not a species of conservation concern but they are an important prey species for predators, such as stoats and foxes, and raptors, and have a significant impact as grazers, maintaining habitats and communities.

The trend for badgers (the dashed red line in Figure 2) is upward, reflecting the continued recovery of the population since the 1960s and '70s when numbers were at a low as a result of continued persecution and the effect of insecticides such as dieldrin. The first legislation to protect badgers specifically was the Badgers Act 1973, which prohibited badger digging for sport. It was followed by the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, and from the 1980s, the population has increased from about 190,000 to 300,000 today.

Counts of foxes and grey squirrels, the other two most commonly recorded species, and of brown hares and rats are shown in Figure 3.

New technology

Last year saw the launch of a *Mammals on Roads* app for the iPhone. Around 120 people did the survey online or with the app, collectively recording over 200 journeys. If you haven't had a look at the website already and have the opportunity, please give it a go – www.ptes.org/mor.



The Tracking Mammals Partnership

There are about 60 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 and at its heart are the many thousands of volunteers whose enthusiasm and experience make the work possible. More information can be found at: www.trackingmammals.org.