



# Living with Mammals update 2014

The winter storms of 2013/2014 were a tumultuous start to the year. Between mid-December and mid-February, the UK saw the stormiest weather for twenty years, and much of southern England, and parts of south Wales and eastern Scotland, experienced as much rain over the period as that expected in six months. For some, in southern England, it was the wettest winter in 250 years.

No less tumultuous perhaps was the Scottish referendum on independence in September. Overnight,

the UK almost lost a fifth of its hedgehogs, as well as most of its pine marten, red squirrel, and red deer. Our wildlife pays little heed to national borders, ownership or management boundaries, and conservation benefits from a joined-up approach.

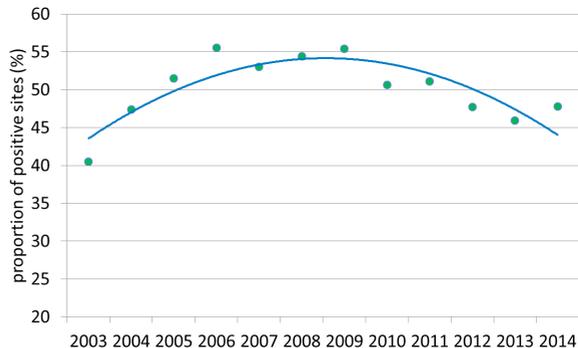
### Bats

Records of bats, collected as part of the National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP) by the Bat Conservation Trust, provide an indication of how bat populations are faring. Records in *Living with Mammals* are mostly of

pipistrelles, but noctules, brown long-eared bats and serotines are also often encountered in built environments. Field surveys of common and soprano pipistrelles in the NBMP, at rural as well as urban sites, show increases from 2003 that either level off or decline slightly (in the case of soprano pipistrelles) after 2009/2010, similar to the pattern shown by *Living with Mammals* (Figure 1). Thinking about how buildings might benefit bats is one way we could improve the places we live and work.

Buildings, new and old, are important to

**Figure 1. The proportion of sites recording bats in each year of the survey. The underlying trend is shown by the line. Brown long-eared bats, below left, are slightly larger than pipistrelles, with broad wings and a comparatively low, slow flight.**



bats: most will make seasonal use of buildings, when maternity roosts are established in the summer. Brown long-eared bats however will sometimes occupy the same building throughout the year. Although rare in urban environments, brown long-eared bats are found in villages and suburban areas, and surveys in the NBMP show a level trend over the last fifteen years.

Bats are extraordinary aerial acrobats, feeding on flying insects such as midges, mosquitoes, caddis flies and moths. Their superb flying skills mean that they're not going to fly into your hair or clothing, and watching them on a summer evening, leaving a roost or feeding overhead, is a fantastic opportunity

to see a mammal in its element, on its own terms.

### Hedgehogs

Several surveys, including *Living with Mammals*, have shown a decline in hedgehogs. Traditionally, urban areas have been seen as a refuge for hedgehogs,

Knowing where wildlife is absent is just as important as knowing that it's there.

but records in these areas are declining just as rapidly as those in the wider countryside. This year was a better one than many for hedgehogs, with records of sightings or signs from 39% of sites, but the trend (shown by the

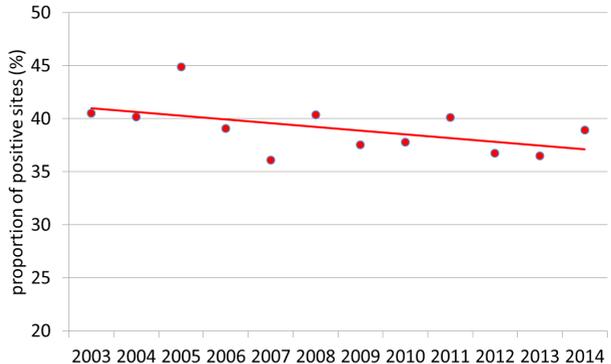
red line, Figure 2) is still downward.

The findings of *Living with Mammals* were presented at a conference of the Wildlife Gardening Forum in November, at the Natural History Museum in London, and the Forum, and projects such as PTES' and the British Hedgehog Preservation Society's *Hedgehog Street*, champion conservation efforts at a local, neighbourhood-scale.

### Brown rats

Brown rats probably arrived in Britain in the 1700s and gradually took the place of the black rat that had been here since Roman times. They're not a species of conservation concern but contrary to the bad press that rats continually receive, we're

**Figure 2. The proportion of sites recording hedgehogs shows a downward trend (solid line). Ensuring hedgehogs can gain access to gardens and move easily between them is one way we can help.**



not overrun by them (there are around seven million rats in Great Britain) and even in cities, where we're most likely to be stepping on each other's toes, the much quoted 'never further than six feet from a rat' is probably nearer fifteen-times that (90ft).

Records of brown rats increased this year (Figure 3) but the underlying trend shows little change over the years that the survey has run (shown by the green line). Wild populations naturally fluctuate in size from year to year: high numbers one year are unlikely to go on rising and unless an area is overrun, rats are not a problem. Rather than trying to reduce numbers by using a poison (which kills the animal slowly

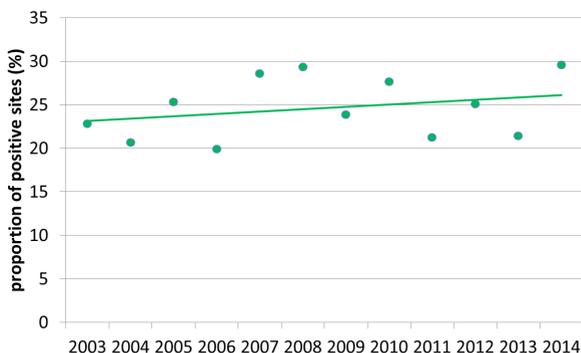
and painfully, and may affect other wildlife and domestic animals), the key to discouraging rats if you don't want them as neighbours is clearing away potential food sources. Keeping bird seed in suitable feeders, picking up fallen fruit and securing food stores means that rats are unlikely to stay long in an area. Don't go out of your way to encourage them and rats won't be a problem.

Recording wildlife and monitoring biodiversity in gardens and urban green spaces is part of understanding the natural processes that provide us with clean air and water, flood defences and better health. Providing these same services with technology is more expensive and

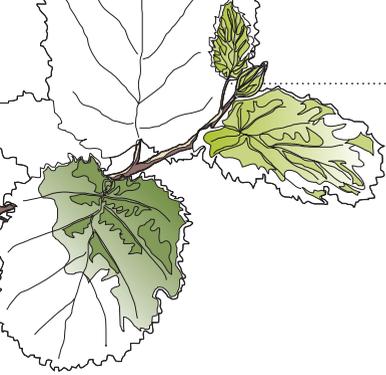
less reliable. Living with mammals in our towns and cities is an indication that we're managing these environments well. Even if you see very few wild mammals, a brown rat or grey squirrel that are common sights, or no mammals at all, letting us know is important. Knowing where wildlife is absent is just as important as knowing that it's there.

Thank you for taking part in this year's *Living with Mammals* – for the wealth of observations and expertise – and for contributing towards informed conservation. We very much hope that you'll be able to help us again in 2015!

**Figure 3. The proportion of sites recording brown rats. Individual years can vary, but the bigger picture, shown by the solid line, is that the population of these social, intelligent animals has changed very little.**



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## Find out more

### **Urban Mammals: a concise guide** **David Wembridge**

(Whittet Books)  
The natural history of 22 species that share our towns and cities is described here, together with chapters on urban habitats, possible conflicts and urban surveys. Brimming with information and with a forward by Chris Packham. We're offering you a special price of £9.99 with free p&p if you quote 'LWM14'. Visit [www.ptes.org/shop](http://www.ptes.org/shop) or call 020 7498 4533.

### **The Mouse Stranglers**

**John Bryant** (John Bryant) The case against the use of poisons and kill-traps to cull wild populations – methods that are often inhumane and may affect other wildlife. The author argues instead for wildlife management and non-lethal solutions to conflicts with urban wildlife. Unsentimental and informed, this is a humane approach to living alongside our wild neighbours. Available for £12, including p&p, from [www.jbryant.co.uk](http://www.jbryant.co.uk)

**Most mammals are nocturnal or active at dusk and dawn, but some do make an appearance during the day. The fox, grey squirrel and wood mouse pictured below were photographed by Jenny Kingsland, Eileen Barnett and Elspeth Wright respectively during the survey. Albino grey squirrels and black (melanic) variants are generally rare but are more common in some areas of the country.**

Jenny Kingsland



Elspeth Wright



Eileen Barnett

