



Living with Mammals update 2019

Our world is changing and understanding how, is fundamental to its protection. The **State of Nature 2019** report looked at how nature has changed in the UK over almost fifty years. It was produced by over 70 conservation NGOs, including PTES, and at its heart are the efforts of many thousands of conservation volunteers. The report recognised the love that millions of people have for wildlife, and the millions of hours spent by volunteers recording the natural world around them. Part of that extraordinary effort is due to you, along with everyone who took part in this year's *Living with Mammals*. Thank you for giving up your time and knowledge, and for caring about nature

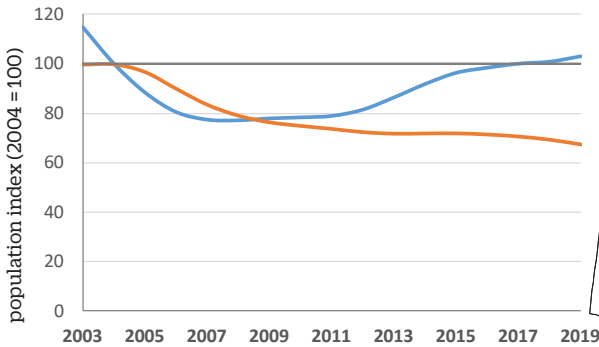
and the green spaces we share with each other and our wild neighbours.

Around 800 people took part in 2019, almost half for the first time, recording thousands of sightings and field signs. Around half of the 58 or so wild terrestrial mammal species in Britain were recorded, including five species of deer (red,

fallow and roe deer, muntjac and Chinese water deer), six mustelids (badgers, otters, stoats, weasels,

pine martens and polecats) and some, such as hazel dormice, red squirrels and water voles, that may be on the brink. The data build a picture of how populations are changing over time and if you can survey the same site next year, please do so! The more years a survey is repeated,

“Around 7,500,000 volunteer hours go into collecting biodiversity monitoring data every year”
The State of Nature 2019



Hedgehogs The trend in the proportion of sites that reported hedgehogs (red line) and the maximum count per week (blue line), taking into account other differences between years and smoothing out fluctuations. The smoothed trend shows the underlying change. The estimate for each year is calculated relative to that in 2004, which is taken as the baseline and given a nominal value of '100'.

the clearer the picture of how wildlife numbers are changing.

How are wild mammal populations changing?

Hedgehogs

In the last full analysis of the data, five species or groups of species showed evidence of a decline since the survey was first carried out in 2003: hedgehogs, bats, mice, brown hares and rabbits.

Hedgehogs have been on the conservation radar for close to two decades. They were made a priority species for conservation in 2007 and *Living with Mammals* has been part of the evidence pushing forward efforts to conserve them. Gardens and urban green spaces can be excellent habitats for hedgehogs: in 2019, over two-fifths of sites (44%) reported either seeing a hedgehog or finding signs of them. Over the years, however, hedgehogs are showing up at fewer sites. The red line in the graph (on page 1) shows the change in the proportion of sites recording hedgehogs. Since 2003, it's fallen by a third. When they are spotted, however, the average

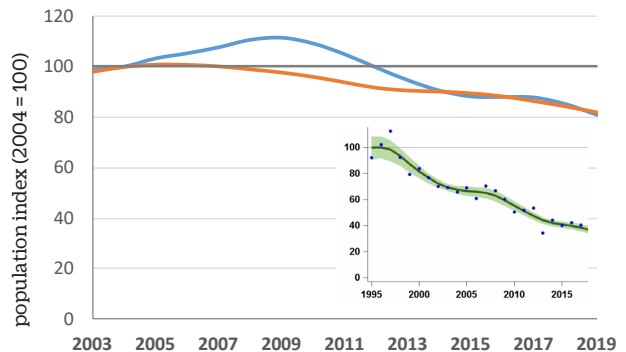
number of hedgehogs in a particular week (shown by the blue line) tells a slightly different story. For the first five years of the survey, counts fell but, since 2008, they've steadily recovered. While there are fewer sites recording hedgehogs now, as a proportion, the number of hedgehogs where they are found is close to its value in 2003.

If we can keep and grow the green space in towns and cities, ensuring it's accessible and connected, then the hedgehog population can recover. We don't need hedgehog havens, but joined-up gardens—whatever their size—allotments and parks, road verges and embankments that encourage biodiversity. Given a chance, hedgehogs are easy-going neighbours.

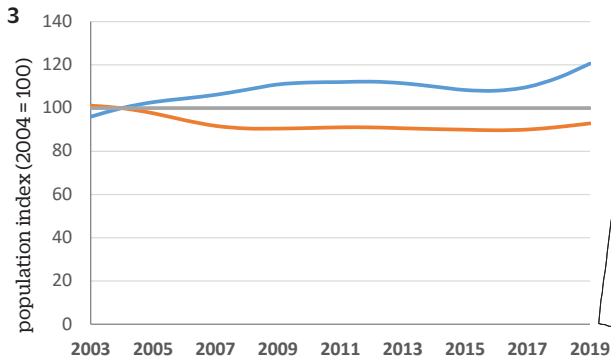
Rabbits

Most people wouldn't think of rabbits as a species of conservation concern. The most recent review by the Mammal Society put their number at around 36 million, but there's evidence that their numbers are declining.

About one in eight sites reported rabbits in 2019 (13%), half that in 2003, and the trend in both proportion of sites and



Rabbits The smoothed trend for the proportion of sites reporting rabbits (red line) and maximum weekly counts (blue line) relative to that in 2004. Inset is the UK trend for wild rabbits from the *Breeding Bird Survey*, run jointly by the British Trust for Ornithology, RSPB and Joint Nature Conservation Committee.



© Alan Hall

Foxes The smoothed trend for the proportion of sites reporting foxes (red line) and maximum weekly counts (blue line) relative to that in 2004.

counts shows a fall of a fifth since *Living with Mammals* started (on page 2).

There's evidence of a decline from other surveys, too. The British Trust for Ornithology's **Breeding Bird Survey** collects records of mammals as well as those of birds but, in contrast to *Living with Mammals*, it covers rural sites, outside urban areas. Between 1995 and 2018, it shows a decline in records of rabbits of 62%, and over the period covered by *Living with Mammals*, the two surveys show a similar pattern, with the steepest decline in the last ten years. The spread of a virus, rabbit haemorrhagic disease, has coincided with the decline.

Although not beloved of gardeners or allotment owners, rabbits are a reminder that we shouldn't be complacent about a wild species, even one still common and one we might wish to see less often among the vegetable rows.

Foxes

While we might not appreciate rabbits, they're important to many other species, not least as food. In the wider countryside, the *Breeding Bird Survey* shows a decline of 42% in fox records between 1995 and

2018, but in urban areas, foxes scavenge more and food is put out by people, and numbers have stayed more or less the same.

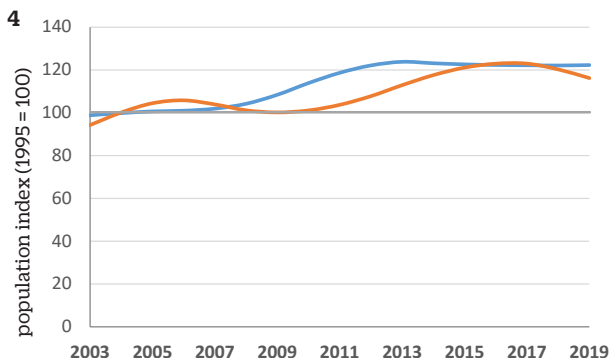
The proportion of sites reporting foxes is slightly lower, and weekly counts, slightly higher than they were in 2004 (above). A study by researchers at Brighton and Reading Universities, a few years ago, found that numbers had risen in some towns and cities in the last twenty years, particularly in the north of England. Further analysis of the *Living with Mammals* data will show whether there's a regional difference, but across the nation as a whole, numbers of urban foxes haven't changed much.

Badgers

Although badgers might not exploit the built environment with as much aplomb as foxes, they can do well in urban areas. The smoothed trends for the proportion of sites recording badgers and weekly counts were both greater in 2019 than when the survey began (shown on the graph on page 4), although they've been flat in recent years.

At urban sites, badgers will downsize: family groups (of five or six on average)





Badgers The smoothed trend for the proportion of sites reporting badgers (red line) and maximum weekly counts (blue line) relative to that in 2004.

are smaller than those in rural areas, occupying smaller setts, with fewer entrances, and home ranges might be a tenth the size of those outside of towns and cities.

Wildier, healthier towns and cities

Increasingly, the importance of urban green space for people and wildlife is being recognised. The value of natural spaces and biodiversity, or 'natural capital',

is taken seriously. Without it, we would be poorer. In July this year, London became the world's first **National Park City** and in August Defra and the Office for National Statistics published the **UK Natural Capital: Urban Accounts**, which used the findings of *Living with Mammals*.

The world is changing. Our connection with nature is a lifeline, and more and more people want to strengthen that.

Thank you for taking part this year and we hope you can do so again in 2020!

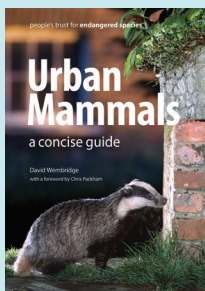
Urban Mammals: a concise guide

BOOK OFFER

From bats and wood mice, to muntjac and badgers, *Urban Mammals* looks at over 20 species found in our towns and cities, describing their appearance and behaviour, as well as clues to identifying field signs. With chapters on urban habitats, possible conflicts and urban surveys, and a forward by Chris Packham.

I hope that this introduction to Britain's urban mammal fauna will lead to a real appreciation of its fragility, its beauty and its real value. – Chris Packham

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