

Suffolk Badger and other Mammals Group

January 2010

Issue 2



Dunwich

AGM 2009 Judith Last

Sat 7th November 2009

The weather was extremely kind to us on Saturday with glorious sunshine and not a drop of rain. The group was divided in two to look for signs of Otters & Water voles on Dingle Farm and Ponies & Badgers on Dunwich Heath.

Simone & Richard led the way through Dingle Farm where we were treated to a wonderful insight into the behaviour of Otter, Water vole & Deer and how to distinguish one lot of droppings from another! Now we knew what to look for we were let loose to find signs of these creatures, which indeed we did.

The last part of the morning was spent looking for the Dartmoor Ponies on Dunwich Forest and investigating a Badger sett led by Adrian and Alan. My group were fortunate to see a Mother and foal with lovely dark coats and beautiful fluffy manes in the trees just off the pathway. The badger sett was a fine example, with plenty of evidence of runs and badger activity and more droppings – of the Badger variety this time!

Both groups met up at the Reading Rooms in Dunwich to consume their packed lunches and down a well earned cuppa.

The final part of the day was a series of really informative talks; we had a "Badgers in Suffolk" update from Adrian, a "Harvest Mouse Project" presentation from Martha, "Other mammals update – Dormice, Otters, Water voles" from Simone and a "Bat detector survey" insight from Arthur. The afternoon was rounded off with the lovely Otter Odyssey a diary presentation of Richard and Adrian's trip to Scotland to find and photograph the Otters.

Many thanks to all who made the day a really enjoyable experience.

Special points of interest:

- AGM summary
- Harvest mouse project - update
- Otters in Suffolk
- Richard and Adrian's remote experience.
- Bat group summary
- Badger group update
- Dunwich Forest Project

Harvest Mouse project - Update.

Martha Cowell gave an excellent update on the Harvest Mouse project which has been running for ten months now. Barn Owl pellets have been collected from over 130 sites, with just under half of all sites found to contain harvest mouse remains! Whilst this would indicate that they are still fairly widespread they may not be as common as they once were, and so it is planned to visit every positive site this winter to check for nests. Site visits will lead to a really good understanding of Harvest Mouse habitat requirements. This means that targeted advice can then be given to landowners hopefully allowing them to spread to new areas and build up really good populations at existing sites.



Captains Wood—Good Barbastelle habitat - Arthur Rivett



Bat Group Surveys - Nick Gibbons

The Suffolk Bat Group carried out further site surveys during 2009 across the County. The format of the survey has now settled into one of doing fixed points with as many as possible recorders rather than the walking a transect approach that had been used in previous years. By coordinating the start time of the recorders it is felt that a better idea of the bats usage of an area can be determined.

A major survey was carried out at the SWT reserve at Arger fen and also at Tiger Hill where a good range of bats was recorded with 45 and 55 Pipistrelle, Noctule, Serotine and Barbastelle as well as a Myotis which was probably Natterer's.

A rather different survey was carried out on Elveden Farms, where the habitat is a mix of broadleaf and conifer belts and plantations, grass heath and large areas of arable. An initial survey had been carried out in the autumn of 2008 with the results being sufficiently interesting and so a full survey was carried out in June and August with 10 recording points. The results confirmed that 7 species of bat were recorded during the visits.

The surprising thing was that after the 45 and 55 Pipistrelle, the next most common bat was the Barbastelle. This confirms the burgeoning view that Barbastelle are not just a feature of ancient and broadleaf woodland but can be found in a wide variety of habitats. It was not possible to determine whether there was a roost site in the immediate vicinity but there has been a roost site recorded from an area only a couple of miles south. With a bat species that likes to move roosts every few weeks and is also so wide ranging in its feeding habitats much more work would be needed to isolate where they are roosting. Other bat species recorded on the site were Noctule, Serotine, a Myotis (probably Natterer's) and a possible sighting of a Brown long-eared bat.

The bat barbeque was held at the SWT Lackford reserve on 8th August and afterwards a walk around the reserve was carried out and recordings made of the bats. A total of seven species were noted. As well as the Pipistrelle, Noctule, Serotine and the ever present Barbastelle the group had Daubenton's bats skimming over the lakes. An additional Myotis (probably Natterer's) was also recorded. A recent barn survey had revealed a Natterer's roost only just down the valley from the lakes so this species was a strong possibility.

Surveying Otters in Suffolk.

Penny Hemphill

I have maintained a comprehensive spreadsheet which details the results of the surveys since then and which is a useful tool for the SWT and Environmental agency. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Malcolm very much for his hard work and commitment and am delighted that he is able to continue surveying for us. SWT is very fortunate that Neil Marjoram, a volunteer who is very interested in mammal work, is happy to carry on Malcolm's work.

The otter surveys (which also include surveying for Water Vole and Mink) provide important data for the SWT and in the last year's survey, a total of 257 sites were surveyed by 31 volunteers and SWT staff. Initial analysis of the data show that otter activity was recorded at 81% of these sites which is a significant increase since the last published report in 2005 when there was 54% otter activity recorded. Otters are now distributed throughout every river catchment in Suffolk and are using smaller water courses as the population increases. This is undoubtedly a conservation success story following the work done by the Water for Wildlife Project, dedicated landowners and volunteers.

It is important to continue to monitor this species so if you would like to be trained and get involved with surveying please contact Penny Hemphill or Neil Marjoram via the SWT at Ashbocking.



All pictures, unless otherwise stated have been taken by Adrian Hinchliffe

Special thanks to Martin Hancock, who at the AGM, very kindly agreed to take on the role of treasurer for the group, and joins Richard Woolnough, Dorothy Casey, Simone Bullion, Judith Last, Arthur Rivett, Matt Fidler and Adrian Hinchliffe on the "Working Group."

Richard & Adrian's Trip report - Island of Carna

September proved to be the highlight of 2009 for me. Richard Woolnough and I had a trip away to a remote Scottish island called "Carna". With no electric, phone signal and no TV, it proved to be a great adventure full of spectacular wildlife!

The first full day was packed full of excitement and anticipation. Richard spotted two Otters, an area next to the cottage window was set up and left baited with peanuts covered in golden syrup for Pine Marten, and the evening air was filled with the roaring of Red Deer stags!

Peering through the window, first thing the next morning, only added to the excitement, the peanuts had gone and Otter number 3 was soon spotted by Richard. Whilst I had been hiding on the shore amongst the rocks, a White tailed eagle flew directly over me and all this was before we'd even had breakfast! As the day continued Richard was up to number 5 on the Otter count and frustration at my inability to see these elusive creatures was starting to creep in. However, a boat trip out in the afternoon to Loch Teacuis, one of Margaret Grimwade's favourite Otter watching vista's, soon rekindled my

enthusiasm though, as we had great views of Common Seal hauled up on the rocks.

As daylight faded into the evening, excitement grew again as the peanut mixture was carefully placed in position, ready for our evening's entertainment. Alas, while I patiently waited, hoping to see the more arboreal member of the mustelidae family, something popped up from behind a rock and then suddenly disappeared again very quickly. As Richard joined me, we both peered through the glass window into the darkness, only to sit back on our chairs in disappointment as a wood mouse began eating the peanuts!



The following day I saw my first Scottish Otter (two actually) and this was the turning point in my quest to try and photograph an Otter. Later that afternoon we spotted another Otter in the same vicinity and I took my first Otter picture. I returned to the same location the next day and was rewarded with 65 minutes, watching an Otter feeding and swimming in the bay at quite close proximity.

On the penultimate day, we ventured out early again splitting up to scan the coastline. As I made my way through the wet heather I spotted an Otter close to the shore. After each dive I moved closer, and onto the rocks. The Otter then caught a fish and swam towards me before getting out onto the seaweed and began eating it approximately 60ft away. After a quick groom and spraint it slipped back into the water and began fishing again. As I continued to watch the Otter, I became aware of another two Otters who seemed more intent on playing and swimming after each other, rather than catching fish. These seemed

to be cubs. They climbed out onto some rocks opposite the bay where I was watching, so I turned my attention to the adult again who after eating a smaller fish out in the water, caught a larger item of prey and proceeded to swim behind some rocks and out of view. I had now lost view of all the otters and was contemplating moving when suddenly the two otters came out of the water right in front of me and started running up onto the rocks, heading directly for me! I tried to photograph them but with all the excitement, speed of their movement and sheer panic that I was going to scare them, I only managed a few blurred pictures. They were now too

close to photograph so I just froze and watched to my amazement as the first otter came round a rock in front of me and literally touched my knee with its nose! Its nose suddenly flared wide open and the otter let out a sharp exhalation of disgust and quickly turned around and both Otters ran back towards the water. However the first otter then stopped and started looking around, but not at me, as if it didn't really understand what had just happened. I managed to regain my composure and started to photograph it again, trying to contain my emotions over what had just happened. After a few moments the Otter returned to the water and after one final emergence amongst the seaweed, it decided to swim off and join the other otter and they swam off into the bay. I sat there grinning from ear to ear totally oblivious to the biting midges and just thought to myself "Richard is never going to believe this" Until he sees the pictures!



Suffolk Badger Update - Adrian Hinchliffe

Probably due to an increase in awareness, reports of Badger casualties have increased from 121 in 2008 to 210 in 2009! These records have turned up reports of badgers in areas previously unrecorded, so our dedicated team of surveyors will be kept busy this winter in tracking down new setts.

We have had two very successful training days earlier in the year at Lackford and Leiston, which is hopefully to be repeated in 2010.

Incidents continue to be reported contravening the 1992 Badger act. These have included gassing, digging into, blocking, and bulldozing setts. These incidents go to show how important sett surveys and detailed mapping are in protecting one of Britain's best loved mammals. I'd like to especially thank those who have given up their time and commitments in assisting this year's enquiries.

With the recent snow adding to the festive feel, another element of enjoyment comes from the great views of mammal activity which can be seen such as in the picture on the left. It shows Badger tracks leading from one entrance to another and then off to a dung pit further up the field. Other mammal tracks often found are Hare, Rabbit, Fox and Deer. Often you can see when the animal is running and in the case of the fox what it is following!



Dunwich Forest Project - Alan Miller

In 2006 as a result of the Alde to Blyth Partnership's vision for the area, and changes in Forestry Commission policy, a new forest design plan was drawn up for Dunwich Forest. Over the next forty years the habitat of the forest will change. The forest will continue to be har-

vested as per its original felling plan, but there will be no replanting of conifers.

The forest has been divided into two sections the southern forest (south of the Dunwich to Blythburgh road) is to be managed as a partnership between FC and the RSPB, with the intention to restore much of the area back to heathland. The northern part of the forest which borders Dingle Marshes and the Walberswick Reedbeds, is to be managed by FC and Suffolk Wildlife Trust and will be allowed to evolve into a mosaic of habitats including heathland, wood pasture and fen.

The forest has no environmental designations and therefore there are no restrictions on the type of management or any targets to be met which means that to a greater extent nature can be allowed to take control.

Increasingly the conservation sector is looking to manage wildlife on a landscape scale and using large herbivores and extensive grazing to achieve the maximum wildlife benefit with the minimum intervention.

The Suffolk Wildlife Trust decided to treat the whole 260ha as one unit and with agreement with Natural England incorporate another 20ha of the Walberswick NNR into one large grazing unit. A 6500m fence was erected along with four cattle grids around the perimeter and all previous public access points had either kissing gates or bridle gates installed. The fence was designed purely to keep livestock in and allow all other wildlife from badgers to red deer to carry on moving through the site as before.

Considerable research went into what type of grazing animal to use and eventually it was decided to use Dartmoor ponies. A number of factors helped reach the decision, the animals are native and currently classified as a rare breed, they are hardy and small so do not intimidate people and do not easily interact with the public tending to keep their distance. A group of animals were sourced via the Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust, which included some in-foal mares. The ponies were released into the forest in December 2008 with four foals being born over the following nine months bringing the total number of animals to 30 at the end of 2009.

The site is now being extensively monitored to keep track of the changes, full breeding bird surveys have been undertaken to give a baseline figure, reptiles have been mapped, butterfly transects have been set up, and a bat box project started. Forty years seems a long time to visualise, but year on year the changes will be evident and the overall management will be reviewed on a regular basis.



Please send any Badger casualty records or sett reports to adrian@wondersofwildlife.co.uk