

# Suffolk Badger and other Mammals Group



June 2010

Issue 3

## AGM 2010

This years "Suffolk Badger & Other Mammals group" Annual General Meeting is to be held at Bradfield Woods on the 30th October 2010 with an earlier than normal start time of 0930 and then on to Felsham Village Hall in the afternoon for all the latest information from the group and an auditory account of some of Suffolk's mammals by sound recorder Malcolm Clarke. The morning session is hoped to include surveying for one of the cutest mammals found in Suffolk - the Dormouse. We will also be looking at the tracks and signs left by the various species of Deer found in the wood. Please make a note in your diaries so you don't miss out on a great day out, stimulating your senses in Suffolk!

At the end of May 2010, Jim Paice, Farming Minister for the new coalition government, revealed at the Devon County Show, that there would be a "scientifically led, targeted cull in hotspot areas" of Badgers in England, in an attempt to eradicate Bovine TB.

However the new Defra Secretary, Caroline Spelman, has indicated that due to the Cull in Wales predicted to start this month, she wanted to "wait to see how the Welsh get on."

## Impending Badger Cull Update.



### Special points of interest:

- AGM - Date & Location
- Impending Cull looms over England & Wales.
- Badger group update
- Bats & Barn Owls
- \*NEW\* Members Scoop
- Harvest Mouse project
- Subscriptions

After an appeal by the Badger Trust, the cull has now been postponed until after June 30th, when the outcome of a judicial review is due to be heard.

In a statement issued from the Wildlife Trusts :

*"The Wildlife Trusts understand that bovine TB in cattle is a significant problem for farming in the UK and that action is required to combat the disease. However, we believe that science should inform any decisions made on culling. The scientific evidence does not support a cull, as the Independent Scientific Group (ISG) on Cattle TB showed in its final report (June 2007). Its firm view was that culling badgers would not solve the problem and could even make things worse. We would like to see the results of the vaccination trials being considered before any further decisions are made, as they may present an alternative to culling. The proposal to cull within 'contained areas' also poses significant difficulties, as it would involve imposing restrictions on the movement of wild animals."*

## Otter Surveying in Suffolk *Penny Hemphill*



### *Suspect a Poisoning?*

Due to two recent events this year here is the number you should call if you suspect a poisoning incident.

To report the suspected poisoning of wildlife or pets call:  
FREEPHONE  
0800 321 600

If you would like to volunteer to help survey for Otters, there will be a training course in the Autumn so please ensure you contact Penny Hemphill of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust and get your name added to the list.

### *Are you a Surveyor for the Suffolk Wildlife Trust?*

If the answer to this is yes, you should have completed the volunteer form (attached). This then enables you to be covered under the trusts insurance policy. Please take the time to download the file, print off the form and return it completed to the SWT.

## *Suffolk Badger Update*

*Adrian Hinchliffe*

After a very cold start to 2010 badger casualties were down on average however March saw a steep rise and whereas in April we seem to average a dip, this year numbers increased further still. The total number of badgers reported killed on Suffolk's roads last year was an all time high of 209! So far this year we have had 73.

Sadly 3 incidents were involving very small cubs, one had been attacked by dogs, I lost count of the number of tooth marks on it. Another very undernourished cub, was found wandering around above ground, in daylight and was reported to Alec Suttlewood of Ipswich



wildlife rescue, who picked it up but despite his best efforts, it regrettably died. Alec also rescued a snared Badger in Elmsett. All was looking good for a successful release when things took a sharp decline and due to the internal injuries caused by these indiscriminate and cruel killers, claimed another victim. The picture right shows how twisted and entangled the snare and undergrowth had become in the animals attempts to escape. All the time it tightens down on the victim. Free running snares are still legal to set depending on location, but once tangled up, do not stay "free running" for long.



seemed more intent on playing hide and seek under the trellis, I eventually caught it and once scruffed, despite its protests, cut it free. This very lively youngster then made a very hasty retreat into the undergrowth and away.

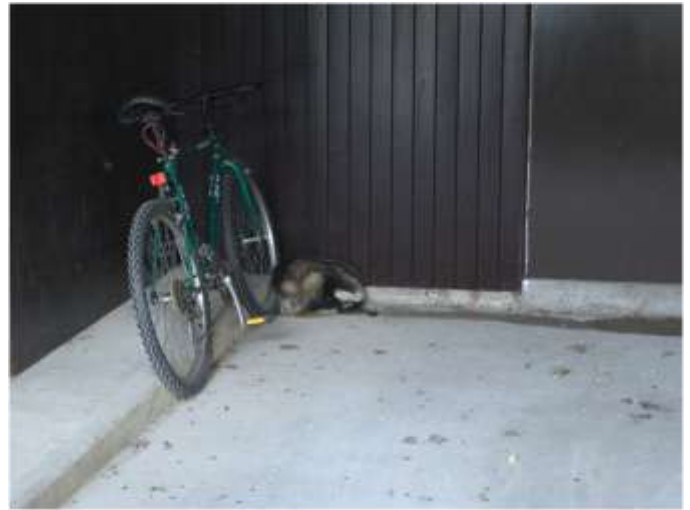
On a brighter note, the cub on the left had a lucky escape in June after becoming entangled in rope intended to tie up a honeysuckle plant. After 3 attempts to catch the badger, who

Richard Woolnough, Dorothy Casey, Simone Bullion, Judith Last, Arthur Rivett, Matt Fidler, Adrian Hinchliffe and Martin Hancock, would like to welcome Alan Miller onto the "Working Group."



## Illegal Immigrant Apprehended, after stealth mission on Suffolk air base.

On Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2010 I received a call about a Badger that had been detained in a garage porch by residents of Lakenheath military air base. I was escorted through the high security check point by Richard Southgate and Squadron Leader Jerry Neild, the Royal Air Force Commander of RAF Lakenheath. Once at the scene of the detainee, it quickly became clear from the barrage of wheelie bins and sturdy wire fencing that the captors of this stripy faced mammal, were taking no chances for any further escape. After entry was made into the porch via a side entrance, I was informed that I was now on my own! As I approached the sleeping rabble rouser it suddenly became obvious that he had obviously been watching Steve McQueen in the Great Escape for as I placed my cage close to hand, the Badger started to climb up onto a bike leaning against the wall. Luckily the badger saw sense and very obligingly dismounted the bike and walked into the darkened cage of its own free will. That was the easy part.



Having watched the badger's movements and giving it a good examination it was clear that this covert badger had simply gone under the radar and entered the base, only to find its return to civvy street blocked. The next challenge was to return it back to its correct neighbourhood without any dispute from rival badger populations. An extensive reconnaissance mission was carried out whilst still under guard from within the airbase but unfortunately without any conclusion.



Another further hour was spent searching the most likely area just outside the base, but again very few badger signs were found. However, after consultation with Arthur Rivett, fellow member of the Suffolk Badger group, with a more local knowledge and map reading skills available over the phone, meant that a local likely badger hotspot was pinpointed. After another on the ground search was

carried out, dung pits, badger pathways and entrance holes were quickly located. As soon as the bottom of the cage touched the bare grass the badger became increasingly excited and began sniffing the turf and scratching at the cage floor. After being left partially covered to acclimatise itself to the surroundings, the cage door was lifted and af-

ter a few moments the badger walked free, well ran actually! It paused momentarily to sniff the ground again before looking around at me, head held high in the air, before trotting further down the grassy track. Another sniff of the grass, and another look behind were the last moments that I saw of the badger before it made a swift exit to the right, into the undergrowth. On investigation this turned out to be a well trodden badger path leading to a sett, obviously well known to this animal.

Operation Meles Meles took over 5 hours and meant travelling more than 100 miles (round trip), but concluded in a very successful capture and release, and produced a very big smile to my face, worth every second to see an animal returned home.



## Bats & Barn Owls

### Nick Gibbons

As a result of some recent visits I have been doing to barns as part of 'Barn owl surveyors' work, I came across a barn where I found bat droppings in the centre of the floor, directly under an old beam with nice old mortise and tenon joints in. A quick check showed that the joints were well stained and it was clear that bats were present in the cavity of the joint. Examination of the droppings showed that these were almost certainly Natterer's

bat and the timing of the visit made it likely that there was or had been a maternity roost present. My visit was part of a request to ascertain whether the barn and the surrounding countryside were suitable for Barn owl boxes.

Both the barns and the surrounding land were suitable for Barn owls and animals had been recorded hunting in the vicinity in the recent past. Owls had also been known to roost occasionally in the barns as pellets had been found on odd occasions.

The presence of the bats concerned me about installing a Barn owl box in the barn and after asking a number of people concerned with the Barn owl project at the annual Badger and Mammal Group meeting, I was still not happy regarding the potential conflict between these species. As a result I have done some digging with the aid of the Bat Conservation Trust who is currently carrying some research on the contents of Barn owl pellets.

Reading 'The Barn Owl' by D.S.Bunn, A.B. Warburton and R.D.S. Wilson (Poyser) I came across the following extract regarding Barn owl diet.

'Instances of specialisation in bat hunting have been recorded. Bauer (1956), for example, found no less than 55.3% of the diet of some Barn owls in Austria to consist of these animals. Three species were identified, the vast majority being the Mouse-eared bat. From identification of those species found in other owl pellet samples it seems that the general rule for other prey applies to this order too, i.e. availability and vulnerability determining which species are taken. For instance, in Britain the four species identified by Glue were the Natterer's, Long-eared, Pipistrelle and Noctule, all among the most widely distributed and abundant members of the Vespertilionidae in the British Isles, and all roosting and breeding in hollow trees and buildings – sites likely to be inhabited by Barn owl. Ruprecht (1979) found the same correlation in the results of 1030 Barn owl pellet collections in Poland: 41.5% contained the remains of 20 of the 21 species of bat found in the country. Broadly speaking, taking into account the relative scarcity of some species, the species present in the greatest numbers were those most likely to share a roosting habitat with the owls. Haverschmidt (1962) recorded 34 bats of three species out of a total of 465 vertebrates taken in Surinam, and Neil Bowman (pers. comm.) found two specimens of the Great horseshoe bat with a single Whiskered bat in the mid-Wales sample.'

'Results – by Numbers of Prey Items. The Small Mammals' View

35,812 pellets, received from 281 locations throughout Britain were sampled.

Species of bat recorded in the study were Greater horseshoe, Natterer's, Daubenton's, Noctule, Pipistrelle and Brown Long-eared.

The pie chart below shows that the three main prey species of the barn owl are field vole, wood mouse and common shrew. The pie chart shows the individual percentage contributions from these 7 small mammals and from the total bird prey items. The remaining 14 species of small mammals, together with the reptile and amphibian prey items are combined to complete the picture. The small mammals provided 99.1% of all the prey items.

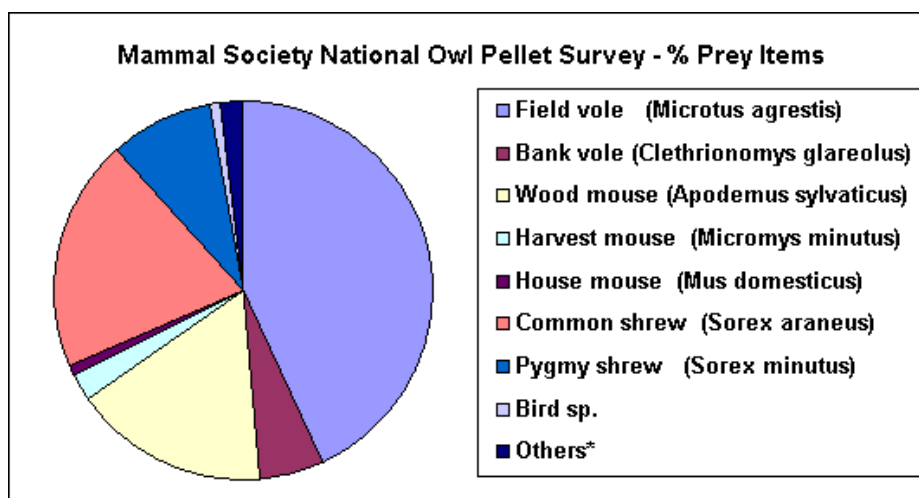


Chart 1. Total data January 1993 to April 2005. Sample size – 125925 Prey Items. Others\* - water vole, yellow necked mouse, common dormouse, brown rat, water shrew, mole, rabbit, weasel, greater horseshoe bat, Natterer's bat, Daubenton's bat, Noctule bat, pipistrelle bat, brown long eared bat, reptiles and amphibians.

As noted above 7 species of small mammals provide over 97% of the prey items. Thus they tell much of the story of these small mammals as prey species and of the owls as predators.

Overall, the field vole, common shrew and wood mouse are the three most common prey species. Out of 1103 pellet batches of 10 or more pellets, the field vole appeared in all but 2 batches, the common shrew in all but 30 batches and the wood mouse in all but 65 batches.

A number of prey species unusual in owl pellets have appeared in the survey results. 6 species of bat have been recovered from pellet batches. A number of moles have also been recorded. This species spends most of the time in its underground burrow system, but does occasionally appear on the surface. Juvenile moles also move across the surface when seeking a new territory in which to start their burrow. A single weasel was recovered from a location in Argyllshire, and a small number of the elusive common dormouse appeared in batches of pellets from locations on the Isle of Wight and in Sussex.

Brown rats provide a small proportion of the prey items at a number of locations. The specimens are almost all juvenile – as are those of the much smaller number of water vole that have been recovered. The same is true for the 3 rabbit specimens that have appeared in the pellets.

On the basis of the above, bat predation by barn owls is very low & it would seem most were likely to share the roosting habitat with the barn owls. Whilst the data currently shows quite a conflict in terms of the total risk to bat colonies by the presence of Barn owls there is sufficient evidence that we need to take the possibility seriously. Generally there is a low level of bats **taken but it is noticeable that Natterer's are the majority.**

I think that while there is a limited chance of serious predation based on the data, there is a risk, and I think it wise to site **barn owl boxes away from Natterer's colonies (or any other bat species?) and that having the barn owl surveyors at least with a basic knowledge of bats would be beneficial in both protecting the bats and also giving us some more information on their whereabouts.** I believe that more holistic approach to Barn owl box siting is required, and I say that as someone that has done a number of barn owl box visits and recommended them in most cases.

Luckily in the instance where I came across the problem there was ample habitat and siting spots for an external tree box some distance away and also an adjacent barn where a box could be sited with minimal risk to any known bat colony.

## Members Scoop!

Sheila Taubler & William Smith



Sheila Taubler sent in this picture of two visitors to her garden from her security camera much to her surprise and delight!

**“Thought I'd bring you up to date with badgers. Can you imagine how surprised and excited the other night whilst watching my badger in the garden when suddenly he looked up and in walked Badger No. 2.....She was a little smaller than him and looked a slightly different colour. I have attached a couple of photos I took.”**

This section is new to the newsletter and I would very much like any members who think they may have an interesting story / comment / picture with reference to any mammal to send them in to me for possible inclusion in future editions of the newsletter. Kind regards, Adrian Hinchliffe



William Smith sent in this picture, from **one of his remote camera's, of these two foxes regularly visiting his garden.**

## Harvest Mouse Project - update

Martha Meek

This new and exciting project has been launched to find out the distribution and population hotspots of harvest mice in Suffolk, as well as looking at new methods to find the mice using owl pellet data. It is one of the first projects of its kind and is only made possible due to the great success of the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project which has nearly 1000 nest boxes across Suffolk and 200 breeding pairs of barn owls. Barn owl monitors are in the process of collecting pellets from these nest boxes which will then be analysed by volunteers to look for harvest mouse remains.



With over 78 people trained in pellet analysis, the total number of pellets surveyed is now in excess of 2000. Harvest mice although making up only a small percentage of the total number of prey items caught, are widespread in Suffolk being found at 42% of all sites.

The visits in winter were very successful, around 35 sites were visited with nests found at nearly every site. Breeding nests are the most obvious sign indicating the presence of harvest mice. We have already learnt a lot about their habitat requirements from the project with many of the nests being found within  $\frac{1}{4}$  Km of the sites where the pellets had been collected from.

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If you would like to become a member of the “Suffolk Badger & other Mammals Group” then please do contact either the Suffolk Wildlife Trust or Adrian (see below)

Please send in any Suffolk Badger casualty records or sett reports to Adrian Hinchliffe via [adrian@wondersofwildlife.co.uk](mailto:adrian@wondersofwildlife.co.uk)