



# The National Small Mammal Monitoring Scheme

Want to get close-up and dirty with real live mammals?

Want to get involved in some real mammal ecology?

Want to contribute to our knowledge of the distribution of small mammals?

Well, The Mammal Society is very excited to announce the launch of its latest monitoring project; The National Small Mammal Monitoring Scheme.

Many of you who have followed The Society's surveys, or even been involved over the last few years, will be aware that we have been developing this project for some time now. In 2006, Stephen Sibbald, Phoebe Carter and I produced a desk study on field methods for monitoring small mammals with proposals for a national monitoring scheme. This was followed by a two-year pilot of the methods, run by Emma Stone and, more recently, a harvest mouse pilot in collaboration with WildCRU and Waterford Institute of Technology. During this time, Phoebe also ran The Society's water shrew survey and we have drawn on the yellow-necked mouse survey in 2000, led by Aidan Marsh.

## The New Scheme

So, after what I hope is adequate preparation and plenty of piloting, we are ready to embark on the real thing! We are interested in all the small mammal species that are routinely encountered in small mammal trapping programmes (Table 1). You will see that we are focusing on four mouse species, two voles and three shrews, but we are also interested in the four species that are only found on a few islands. "What about dormice?" I hear you cry. Well, they are a bit different from these species, partly because they rarely come down to ground level and partly because of their specific habitat requirements. They also have a very successful monitoring scheme, using specific field methods, already running. The other obvious species missing from this list are the water vole, the brown rat and black rat. All three of these species are too big to fit into Longworth traps and, like dormice, water voles are habitat specialists that already have their own specific field techniques. Brown rats are currently being monitored by the Commensal Rodent Survey.

Table 1. Species Targeted by NSMMS			
<i>Ubiquitous Species</i>	<i>Britain</i>	<i>Ireland</i>	<i>Islands*</i>
Wood Mouse	✓	✓	✓
Yellow-necked mouse	✓		
Harvest mouse	✓		
House mouse	✓	✓	✓
Bank vole	✓	✓	
Field vole	✓		
Common Shrew	✓		
Pygmy shrew	✓	✓	✓
Water shrew	✓		✓
<i>Island Species*</i>			
Orkney & Guernsey voles			✓
Millet's shrew			✓
Lesser white-toothed shrew			✓
Greater white-toothed shrew		✓	✓

\* Islands here only refer to Orkneys, Scillies and Channel Isles



A brave harvest mouse on "parallel bars"!  
Photo: D. Crawley

## The Harvest Mouse; Our Flagship Species

We are declaring the harvest mouse as our first flagship species. Not only are they Britain's smallest rodent, they are also the only BAP species in our list. So, we will be asking volunteers to target habitats that are especially attractive to these elusive creatures, such as reed beds or hedgerows with lots of tall grasses and bramble. But we also want to include other interesting habitats for small mammals, such as woodland, scrub, ditches, moorland, coastal or suburban habitats. In fact, we know so little about the relationships between small mammals and their habitats that you



Can you spot the harvest mouse nest?  
Photo: A. Halcrow-Johnston / M. Ryan

could include any habitats, even some where you might not expect to find much.

The first autumn season will run from 1<sup>st</sup> October to 30<sup>th</sup> November this year. At this time of year, small mammal populations are at their highest, having spent the fruitful summer months having several litters of young. The next season will be in April/May 2010, when populations will have declined over the winter. But this season gives us the most valuable data on the core, breeding populations. We intend to



There it is – in the clump of cock's-foot!  
Photo: A. Halcrow-Johnston / M. Ryan

repeat this pattern of spring and autumn fieldwork over the coming years, to pick up the peaks and troughs of these highly variable mammal populations.

## How Can You Get Involved?

If you volunteer to take part, we will send you a Volunteer Pack and give you a choice of a couple of nearby squares; the one you choose will become “your” square. We have designed the scheme to allow volunteers to contribute in a number of ways. The different field methods allow people with a wide range of experience and expertise to be involved. There are six different methods to choose from (Table 2), all except the barn owl pellet searches based around 100m transects – you can select whichever you feel most confident with. We would encourage volunteers to try more than one method within each square. For example, you could easily do a bait-tube transect or search for harvest mice on your own, but maybe you could join a local mammal group to get involved with live-trapping and learn more about small mammals.

**Table 2.** Field Methods for the NSMMS

Barn Owl Pellet Searches	Easy to do with little experience, but allows you to gather good quantities of data.
Bait-tubes	Quick and easy to do and provides very good data on a range of species. “Cutting-edge science”
Harvest Mouse Nest Searches	Relatively quick (with some training), and gives a real “hands-on” feeling.
Field Vole Sign Searches	Also relatively quick with a chance of actually spotting our commonest small mammal.
Low Density Live-Trapping	This simple trapping method allows you to actually see small mammals “close-up”
Intensive Live-Trapping	A more time-consuming method, but the “gold-standard”, providing the best quality data.



A Bait-tube in bankside vegetation  
Photo: P. Carter

## What To Do Next

If you want to take part, you can either do so through your local mammal group or as an individual. Return the Expression-of-Interest form to

small.mammals@mammal.org.uk  
or

3 The Carronades, New Road,  
Southampton, SO14 0AA

Contact The Mammal Society office;  
(02380 237874) for more information.



A Longworth trap in the base of a hedge  
Photo: S. Poulton

We hope you’ll be keen to be involved in this exciting project.

**Simon Poulton**  
**Surveys Manager**