

## HARVEST MOUSE

*Micromys minutus* (Pallas, 1771)

Order: Rodentia

The harvest mouse is Europe's smallest rodent, weighing in at between 4-6g (less than a 2p coin!) and measuring only 50-70mm in length. Their small size is reflected in their Latin name '*Micromys minutus*' derived from *Micros* (small), *Mys* (mouse) and *Minutus* (tiny). Small tiny mouse!

They have a reddish/yellow coat with a white underside. They are the only British mouse with hairy ears and they have a blunter nose than most other mouse species.



Harvest mice usually have two or three litters a year between late May and October. There are usually around six young in a litter, which are born in carefully woven grass nests, roughly the size of a tennis ball.

The harvest mouse was first described in 1767 by the naturalist Gilbert White. He noted, '*they never enter houses; are carried into ricks and barns with ye sheaves, and abound in harvest*'. Although they are traditionally associated with arable fields, recent research shows that their main requirement is tall dense vegetation which means they can live in a range of habitats including reed beds, roadside verges, open grassland and hedgerows

Harvest mice have very high energy requirements and typically eat seeds, berries and small insects. They usually feed around dusk and dawn in the stalks of long grasses and reeds. In winter however, as the vegetation dies back, they spend more time foraging at ground level.

Harvest mice have many predators including weasels, stoats, foxes, cats, owls, hawks, crows and even pheasants. Harvest mice are also vulnerable in low temperatures and can die from cold and starvation in harsh winters.

