

Wood Mouse

Apodemus sylvaticus (Linnaeus, 1758)

Order: Rodentia

The body of the wood mouse measures 81-103mm, with a tail almost as long again. Adults weigh 13 to 30 grams. The fur is reddish-brown mixed with yellow above, and a white/grey below. There is often has a small yellow patch on the throat. This mouse has very large ears and protruding eyes, and large back legs which allow it to jump and climb well. Juveniles weigh less than ~13 grams and have a greyish coat. There is little external difference between non-breeding adults although the distance between their genital and anal openings is greater in the male than the female.

The footprints of the wood mouse are small, with a hind foot length of about 20-30mm. The forefeet have 4 toes, whilst the hind feet have 5. Droppings are cylindrical and about 8mm long with rounded ends. Wood mice burrow and leave runway tracks within grass. These are deeper and often more out in the open than vole burrows. Food caches may be found in disused bird's nests and beneath tree roots. Wood mice leave characteristic gnaw marks on hazelnuts and pips.

The yellow-necked mouse is superficially similar but generally has a conspicuous yellow patch across its chest and it is much larger than the wood mouse, weighing 22-45grams. However it has not been confirmed as a resident in Cornwall.

The wood mouse is mainly a nocturnal species, although occasionally active during the day. They breed from March to October and the female will have 1 to 4 litters of 4 to 7 young. However, where there is abundant food they may continue to breed throughout the winter. The young are weaned at 18-22 days. Individuals will share burrow systems in the winter, but during the breeding season females will nest singly in defined home ranges. The male has a larger home range than the female. Wood mice can live to about 18 months, with few animals surviving two breeding seasons

A widespread and highly adaptable species found in many different types of habitat including woodland, scrub, hedgerows, farmland and gardens. Sometimes found in buildings, especially in the winter. They often live in underground tunnels, which may have chambers for nests and food storage. Many generations of wood mice may use the same tunnel system. Wood mice are rarely found on open land at higher latitudes. Wood mice are mainly herbivorous, eating seeds, nuts, grain, fruits, buds and fungi. They will also eat invertebrates such as caterpillars and worms.

Carnivores such as foxes, badgers, stoats and weasels, and domestic cats, may predate on wood mice, as well as birds of prey such as owls. Some predators such as the tawny owl are thought to rely on small mammal prey so heavily, that if the latter's numbers are too low the owls will not breed. Considered a pest by some, humans also persecute wood mice through trapping and poisoning. However, they are also beneficial as they may consume harmful insects and disperse plant seeds.



