

Shropshire

Newsletter

Issue 45: Winter 2020-21



Mammal Group



Working to protect British Mammals

Affiliated to the Mammal Society

Special Winter Fox issue!

Tim's Fox! Sally-Ann's Fox! Fox Tracks! Stu's Fox! Sam's Foxes!*
Thorburn's Foxes! Robin's Fox! Tunncliffe's Fox!



*No... not Sam Fox; Sam's Foxes!

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN WINTER

Published Quarterly Since 2009

WELCOME...

...to Shropshire Mammal Group Newsletter 45!

As you know by now, every issue of the SMG Newsletter is a special issue, thanks to the excellent contributions we receive from loyal members willing and happy to put fingers to keyboards and shutter buttons, to produce quality nature content, quarter after quarter, for our members for over ten years. Thank you so much for your hard work and innovation; I know only too well how hard it can be to put together a single article. It's honestly much easier to edit and lay out other peoples' work!



Anyway! In the last massive Home and Garden Mammals issue, we had fox articles from Robin Bennett and myself, and for this issue we're really pursuing that fox theme with the [first piece](#) for a long while from Tim Preston (welcome back Tim!), [a sighting](#) from Sally-Ann Hudson and [a major foxy article](#) from Sam Devine-Turner, describing, quite movingly, how seeking out some foxy time in nature (it's even possible in our larger towns) can help us deal with anxiety and improve our mental health.

Elsewhere, there's several more foxes among the retro-delights of my own [vintage mammal books review](#); Robin returns with [an account of wildlife spotting](#) on his 'new patch' featuring foxes, of course, A fox appears in Stu's [Greatest Tweets](#) compilation along with an unfeasible number of his favourite 'round-eared carnivores', and there's another stunning chestnut-coloured mammal in the shape of [a garden stoat](#), observed by new contributor Shelley Eve, who proves she is no one-mammal-specialist by also chipping in with not only [water vole but also water shrew photography](#)! Welcome Shelley, and thank you for allowing us to share your superb images. Yet another red mustelid [gets a mention](#) up in my neck of the woods, Dave Lewis celebrates a [mouldy old shrew](#), there's words of wisdom from Stuart and Malcolm, a [digest of recorded mammal talks](#), and inevitably some mildly exciting [obligatory bones nonsense](#) (well, that's what you pay your membership fee for!)

If the great articles in this issue have inspired you, it's never too early to think about contributing to the next SMG Newsletter in any way you can (hurry hurry hurry... be like JFK! Well... not in every way, obviously...) If you have an article idea, get in touch as soon as you like, via the usual channels. Don't hold back / Get scribbling / you know it makes sense! So look out for your next SMG Newsletter in your mailbox at the usual publication date around the Spring equinox; meanwhile, take care, stay safe, look after loved ones. I hope I'll see you someday very soon.

Ric Morris ric_morris@hotmail.co.uk

This!

The usual disclaimer applies- the opinions expressed in the SMG Newsletter are those of the individual contributors, not necessarily the views of the SMG, unless stated to be so.

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We have another Facebook group for paid-up members only, at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1176934462327779/>
And don't forget the Pine Marten Project page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/shropspinemartens/>
Our website is <https://shropshiremammalgroup.com/> and we're also on Twitter: @Shropmammals
If you spot a mammal in Shropshire, please record it via bit.ly/SMGrecord or email Lorcán Adrain at SMGrecord@gmail.com
Articles and photos for the next issue of the SMG Newsletter to Ric Morris, Editor, at ric_morris@hotmail.co.uk please

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BREAKING NEWS

Heads-up!

BREAKING NEWS

On Saturday 13th February 2021, Shropshire Mammal Group will present an online guide to mammal bone identification, delivered via Zoom by Ric Morris, SMG Newsletter editor. Full enrolment information will be issued shortly via email and social media; it'll be FREE to existing SMG members! This event will feature freshly created, brand-new content not included in previous SMG bones workshops! Further details on [page 17](#) of this Newsletter. See you soon, boneheads!

"Ask not what your Mammal Group can do for you, ask what you can write for your Mammal Group Newsletter"
- John F. Kennedy



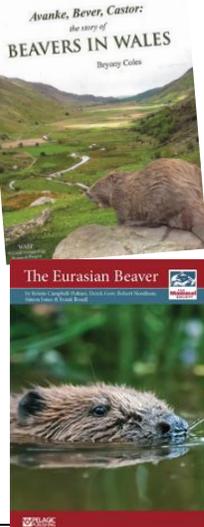
Note from the Chair

by Stuart Edmunds, **SMG Chair**



I had hoped that the start of 2021 would bring changes and a return to outdoor surveys and events. But it looks like we will have to all wait a little longer! There is light at the end of the tunnel now at least and I expect that we will be safe to resume mammal-related activities ideally in the spring but hopefully by the summer.

We might all be limited to where we can travel for the next few weeks, so now is a good time to find out more about what we have living on our doorsteps and local area. It is still possible to collect mammal records, which helps us develop a better idea of population trends and presence of species.



Get up-to-speed with your beaver knowledge in advance of a possible local reintroduction soon.

Some exciting times are on the horizon for an additional mammal species to spot in Shropshire this year too. The idea of releasing beavers has been floating around for a few years now, but things have taken a giant step forward recently with a successful bid for funding. There is still much work to be done and more funds to be raised, but it is anticipated that beavers could return to the county before the end of this year, although there won't be an official announcement until the spring. Releasing beavers is a complicated affair. First, a public consultation needs to take place to educate people living in the release area about the project and beaver ecology. Hydrological surveys and mitigation plans need to be drawn up, a license will be applied for and a kilometre of beaver-proof fencing will need to be installed. The project will see two beavers released into an enclosed site as a local trial; beavers won't be released into the wider area and given free reign. But if the trial goes well, that would be the next step.

Thanks to everyone for attending our first online AGM on 23rd January. It was certainly a different affair to our past AGMs, but I was delighted that we were able to get to grips with the technology required and make the meeting happen, given the current circumstances! For those of you who were unable to attend the meeting, it is now available to watch online via this link:

https://youtu.be/5hImQbX_rvY. The *Hedgehog Heroes of Shropshire* talk, presented by our new committee member Kathryn Jones, runs immediately after the short AGM and is well worth a watch. Kathryn is a welcome addition to the Committee and her experience and passion for hedgehogs will no doubt be a great asset to the Group.



Wrong type of record Ric!

So, times are a little difficult at the start of this new year, but the end of 2021 is looking much brighter!

Stuart Edmunds

Malcolm's corner

by Malcolm Monie
SMG Treasurer and Membership Secretary



Shropshire Mammal Group is grateful to its corporate members for their support.

[Pearce Environment Ltd](#)

[Field Studies Council, Preston Montford](#)

2020 ended with both recruitment *and* the total membership of 164 at record levels. We acquired 28 new members during the year plus three lapsed members who re-joined. Against that, we lost twelve members for a variety of reasons. The lack of field activities was more than offset by Ric Morris's magnificent newsletter [*Thanks Malcolm, you're too kind! Ric*] and the members-only Facebook page. With that in mind, we have occasionally received requests to join our pages from potentially suspicious accounts, and for this reason we do have security questions on both the public and members' pages to weed out the spammers. Please do answer the questions that are put to you so that we can welcome you promptly onto our pages, although bear in mind that while we have several admins, it's only I who have access to the complete list of paid-up members who'll qualify for the members' page!



In 2021, we are looking at the possibility of putting local clusters of members in touch with each other. I shall be emailing members shortly about this. (I know I've said this before, but it will happen!)

January is still our biggest month for subscription renewals and I would like to say thank you to all the 51 members who renewed promptly during the month. There are still a few more to come. On top of this, we've acquired seven new members so far in 2021, and a very warm welcome to you all!

Malcolm Monie, SMG Treasurer & Membership Secretary

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Orange friends

by Sam Devine-Turner



I'll admit that this pandemic has been getting the better of me. It has taken a deep emotional toll, as two of my family members are high-risk and would be incredibly ill at the least if they were to catch Covid-19. Furthermore, having asthma and damaged lungs, I am not exactly immune myself. And so I am constantly worrying. While I'm working, I'm worrying. While I'm cooking, I'm worrying. While I'm washing, I'm worrying. You get the picture. This is also taking its toll on my physical health. Some days I can barely find the energy to get out of bed, or get dressed, or pick up a book. However, over the last few weeks, some encounters with some orange friends have given me strength and focus, and have allowed me to get lost in the present, alleviating some of my stress and anxiety.

Around Christmastime, in dire need of some fresh air and nature time, I headed out for a little wander around Shrewsbury, taking my secondhand Canon with me. I am not by any stretch a photographer, but I do enjoy taking photos of wildlife and nature. As I walked through a very well-visited park near the town centre, I caught a strong whiff of fox. 'How exciting!', I thought. 'How lovely that there is a fox here. There's absolutely no chance that I will be lucky enough to see them though, with all these dog-walkers and loose dogs about.' However, to my surprise, towards the other end of the park, some movement in a field opposite caught my eye. As I turned to look, I noticed that this four-legged shape was bright orange, and had a rather bushy tail and black-tipped ears – fox! I yelled in excitement, brought my camera to my eye, and began trying to capture images of the fox. Dog-walkers who passed me wondered what I was doing, followed my gaze, and were equally surprised to see a fox. People paused to watch the beautiful animal with me. One gentleman stopped to tell me that it was a vixen, and she had had cubs the previous year; four of them. He told me roughly where her den had been. It was so wonderful to see that so many people were enthralled by the fox. The fox doesn't always have the best reputation, and it doesn't catch a break; in urban areas, it is often considered vermin, and in rural areas, it is hunted illegally and ripped to pieces by packs of dogs. However, it seems the people of Shrewsbury are kind to their foxes and feel lucky to have them around.



On this day, I watched the fox for a while, and I have returned many times since. During one of these encounters, as it was getting almost too dark to see and I was about to leave, suddenly another shape dashed across the field to meet the first shape, and again I yelled. 'TWO foxes!', I exclaimed. I may be wrong, but I assume that they are a courting pair, and I am so hoping that they use the same den as the previous year to have and rear their cubs.

Over the past year I have been learning about bird language, and how all animals listen to the birds, because birds tell you which predators are about and where. It pays, if you are a prey animal, to listen to the birds. I have been able to put some of what I've learned into practise, as the birds most definitely respond to the foxes. More often than not, a few minutes before the foxes appear, a blackbird will give a dismissive but stern 'bip.. bip.. bip'. Occasionally, when I imagine they are caught off guard by a fox suddenly appearing nearby, they will let out a much more shocked and

much more characteristic blackbird alarm call – a tuneful yelling, almost. I have noticed that there is one tree that the pigeons like to roost in, and before the fox appears, from the direction I assume the fox is coming, all the pigeons stare in that direction, turning and moving around the tree to follow a shape skulking past the base of the tree. There are two magpies that respond in an interesting way. They seem to sometimes act like the pigeons, sitting high in trees to stare down and follow the fox with their eyes and bodies, and sometimes act like the blackbirds, scolding the foxes for having the audacity to crawl through the bramble below them.

Once, I even caught the magpies following the fox around the open field as they foraged, flying at the fox and then away again to land on the ground. Blackbirds started joining in, and before they knew it the fox was surrounded by teasing birds, telling foxy 'you can't get the jump on us, we see you, we know exactly where you are!'. I could almost read



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the annoyance in the fox as they turned to stare sulkily at the birds multiple times while making their way across the field.



I have seen some amazing grimaces from the foxes as they chew through earthworms they have foraged from the field floor. I guess earthworms don't taste all that nice! I have yet to witness the foxes hunting for small mammals, but I imagine this is something they are more likely to do under the cover of dark when the voles can't see them approach and there are no scolding birds to give them away. I can't wait to find the remains of birds and rabbits strewn outside the entrance to the den as daddy fox brings food for the vulnerable cubs and tired mumma, and mummy fox kicks out the inedible bones, fur and feathers once they are done eating.



Recently, I have braved setting up my trail cam, even though there is a high risk of theft in such a well-visited area. My bravery (or perhaps stupidity) has been rewarded with some lovely videos of the foxes running past the camera. I would love to get some better photos and videos so that I can see the face, ear and tail markings and try to learn how to tell the individuals from each other.



I visit the foxes a few times a week on my daily exercise, now we are back in lockdown. It has really given me something beautiful to focus on. Whilst I am with the foxes, I confess I'm totally enamoured by them, completely in tune with them and the birds that tell me so much about where the foxes are and what they are doing. I become incredibly present, and I have no anxiety about the past or the future. When it gets too dark to see and I head home, I breathe a sigh of contentment, and I have a smile on my face.



So thank you, orange friends. Thank you for allowing me to feel some peace during such a challenging time.

Sam Devine-Turner



My garden stoat

Adapted from an original Facebook post, and reused with permission

Words and photos by Shelley Eve

On January 16th this year, I spotted a stoat *Mustela erminea* in my garden near Eye in Suffolk, and was super excited to learn more, so I asked to join the [Small Mustelid Research Network](#) on Facebook. Much to my surprise I spotted it again first thing the following morning... and then later with a dead rat *Rattus norvegicus*, so I ran to get my camera. They are not the best of photos but it was incredible to watch its strength as it dragged its prey to a safe cache.

I watched from a distance (I have a large lens); the rat was a bit of a struggle for it. The stoat seemed to take the rat through a hole at the base of the shed out of sight, then it would appear on the shed roof and dangle the rat over the edge; I think heading for a gap between the sheds. Each time the weight of the rat and the difficult location won; the stoat would drop the rat and have to repeat the exercise. I wondered why it would be so intent in getting the rat into such an awkward place, and whether it could have young.



Some of the replies I received from other members of the Facebook mustelid page suggested that it would be too early in the year for the stoat to have a family, and that it was likely to be a male due to the thick neck and muscular shoulders. The reply said that the males are much bigger and the physical characteristics of the sexes become familiar after spending time observing the animals. This made sense to me as I spend a lot of time watching hares and you begin to see subtle differences between individuals.



This was a big rat, I'd say full adult size.



I'm the hardest critic of my own photos, so although they're great from a behavioural point of view and I was happy to see it, I am already hoping for many more photo opportunities and to get to know my garden stoat a little better!

Shelley Eve

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The timings of a shrew (a dog's tale)

by Dave Lewis



For those of us who regularly walk our dogs *Canis barkerfartalotii*, their outdoor behaviour often marks them as very frustrated beings indeed: not quite one thing or the other; their instincts take over and it's head down, sniffing here and there, ears pricked up at twiggy noises, and tails poised ready for running. Most responsible owners have them on leads, but where and when appropriate, let them off for a good run. It is useful to see how they behave, as although they are thoroughly domesticated, it is easy to see when the entrenched instinctive actions kick in. Of course, all need to relieve themselves – and after the copious initial 'first one of the day', the follow-up stops are invariably scent markings. This is all too obvious with a pack of monkeys like mine. One marks, the others follow and often in exactly the same spot, reinforcing the pack markings. Interestingly, the defecating process seems to follow different rules. Whilst some dogs just about go anywhere (much to the occasional social embarrassment of the owner), others are more considered and specifically choose a location, though only very rarely will dogs use the same spot as each other. Some will, in fact, resort to instinctive behaviour, especially if they've been displaying some dominant behaviour during the run, and will place their waste on an elevated site like a grass tussock, rock or tree stump. Very fox-like! Those of us who are responsible owners, bag-up the droppings and remove, but the scent is still present as a marking.



Other behaviour is often prevalent especially in tussocky grass terrain. The heads are down with ears pricked (obviously listening for voles and shrews); rapid pouncing with nose buried in the grasses inevitably means (hopefully) an escaping mini-mammal. It is often the case that the dogs' actions highlight great spots to find the runs through the grass understory and even feeding stations of field voles (right). The primary predators are barn owls *Tyto alba* and other avian raptors. The owls, of course, have the offset hearing for directional accuracy and focused head feathers for just this purpose. This time of year, the small mammal runs are more easily visible (left). I exaggerated this one for viewing and closed it up afterwards but if you follow through the larger clumps, you may even find a feeding station.



The audible aspect, such as the interpretation of sensitive and ultrasonic recordings of small mammal voicings (such as via bat detectors) is now the subject of science research; but with heartrates of some 25Hz just below dogs' hearing sensitivity at 67-45KHz, they can probably hear the high frequency communication and alarm squeaks anyway. Sounds an interesting study area.

I found a dead pigmy shrew a month or so ago; left it for the natural reduction, and discovered that while it was decaying, a fungus had added to the process and helped further reduce the animal. Things have been a tad slow this year, so even a dead shrew was a highlight ... (sigh...)

Let's hope 2021 is fuller and freer so we can get back to whatever "normal" was before.

Dave Lewis



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Mammal Eyewitness: The winter fox (i)

by Tim Preston



On New Year's Eve I ventured out exploring, and I had the perfect end to my photographic year with an unexpected encounter.

I went out with the hope of spotting barn owls *Tyto alba*. On my way to the field where I have seen them before my hopes of an owl were fading as the ground underfoot was not just sodden, it was flooded and frozen. I was on the verge of turning round and heading home when I caught that distinctive whiff - Fox!

I stopped and waited a while... nothing. I heard a blackbird *Turdus merula* alarming in the distance, always a good sign a predator is about, so I made my way along the edge of the field, staying low against the high grasses growing from the ditch behind me; trying not to give away my location. This was hard as the ice was crunching underfoot like cornflakes being crushed in their packet.

I spotted the fox *Vulpes vulpes* off in the distance, it had its back to me, the animal shone like a gold bullion bar as the warmth of the setting sun lit it up. It was literally glowing. A dog, I believe, as it cocked its leg on a tussock of grass. I stayed low and worked my way closer. Over the course of about fifteen to twenty minutes I managed to get nearer and nearer, following it through two fields.



ALL THINGS FOXES

"Foxes smell because of multiple glands and sacs in their body, around their anus, and at the base of their tail. They use urine, and other chemicals their bodies produce, for scent marking. The smell of fox urine is hard to clean and lasts for weeks". Allthingsfoxes.com



On one occasion it looked directly at me as the ground crunched beneath my feet, capturing its attention. The fox held my gaze in a moment which seemed to last forever. I was expecting it to bolt but, it didn't. It's hard to explain moments like that but when a wild animal accepts you as not being a threat and carries on going about its business, it is special. I watched the fox for a further twenty minutes as it prowled the field until it slipped through a hole in the hedgerow and vanished into the tussocky grass.



BARN OWL A dweller in old gables, church towers, and farm buildings; a good friend of man for it destroys great quantities of rats, mice and voles. It is chiefly a dusk and night hunter, but will occasionally hunt in broad daylight, looking like a large pale buff moth as it quarters the fields and hedgerows. It makes no nest, and lays its eggs on the bare boards or other hard surfaces of its retreat. The barn owl does not hatch all its eggs together, but at intervals, beginning to incubate as soon as the first egg is laid. Consequently, the nestlings in one nest are invariably of different sizes.

I didn't see a barn owl but I'll take a fox encounter any day of the week! Amazing what you can see if you pay attention to not only the sights and sounds of your environment but, the smells too!

Tim Preston

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Not this time... Ric Tunnicliffe, Brooke Bond Bird Portraits 1957

Mammal Eyewitness: The winter fox (ii)

Originally posted to Facebook and reused with permission

by Sally-Ann Hudson



2020 seemed to have saved one of the best days for last. Lovely long walk in the bright sunshine and snow from the house near Wentnor with my sister Jenny.



Stunning scenery, blue sky, red kites, cold fresh air, good company, oh and we saw a fox in the distance out for a jaunt!



We are so lucky to live in a place like this. It felt like Narnia. A lovely sunset with the sky turning pink over the Long Mynd and then a deep purple looking south. New Year's Eve chips with Mum for tea, and hot mulled wine outside in the garden as darkness fell. Then indoors to warm up and watch *Paddington*.



Sally-Ann Hudson

A weasel in winter

by Ric Morris



My family and I have a couple of easy walks we can do from the house – down to the bottom of our lane and turn left will take us eventually to Mitchell's Fold stone circle, with panoramic views further into mid-Wales; turning right takes us along a straight, level road running more or less parallel with the A488 Shrewsbury to Bishop's Castle road, and which offers more of a power walk. During the snow at the beginning of January off we went in that direction, scouring the hedges with binoculars for small birds and the rough grazing fields for migrant thrushes and starlings. A couple of kilometres from the house we came across a trail of canine prints in the snow at a junction with a narrower lane. No shortage of dog walkers along here but these were smaller and not as fresh as the dozens of dog prints around them. The majority had no details as they'd been significantly distorted by melting and refreezing but I did manage to satisfy myself that they were fox prints, *Vulpes vulpes*. Foxes tend to 'direct register', meaning that they place their hind feet almost exactly into the track left by the forefeet. This can lead to blurring and distortion of the individual tracks somewhat, but it also means that the fox tends to leave a straighter trail of prints while a dog doesn't direct register as consistently, so its trail tends to straddle a median line. My wife Jane and I had some fun following the trail back along the verge, here and there the trail strayed onto the cleared road or it would be overlaid with human footprints and their dogs. But a couple of hundred metres or so further along we saw where the fox had slipped through to the road from a farm gateway, and that was as far back as we could trace it.



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Fox pad and trail pics by Ric, 9th January 2021

Pleased with our minor tracking success we reached our customary turn-around landmark and headed for home again. Halfway back, our attention was drawn by a rustle in the hedgerow; quick check with binoculars, just a dunnock *Prunella modularis*. As we pondered the curious naming history of dunnocks- from a taxonomically inexact hedge sparrow and hedge warbler, through the curiously worded hedge accentor, the bird flew across the road to the opposite hedge. Our binoculars were almost lowered by this time, and there's some very mild family rivalry about who first saw what happened next; but I will give J the benefit of the doubt...

A sudden fluffing-up and scuffling in the verge snow, maybe six or seven metres in front of us. Flakes flying in all directions as a tiny red head popped up and shook itself. A bit more scuffling, and a slim shape bounded onto the road, suddenly immobile as it stared at us. 'Weasel!!' we both gasped audibly. Another vigorous bound to the centre of the road, another quick stop and stare, then a hurried scurry to the opposite verge. The whole sighting took less than four seconds. Still tightly gripping our lowered binoculars in surprise, there was hardly an opportunity to grab the camera also around my neck; I just wanted to enjoy the sight.

You may recall that I have previous form for *not* photographing a weasel *Mustela nivalis* crossing my path at close quarters (See *SMGN35, Summer 2018*, left) so I quickly tried to incite a reappearance by making rabbit-in-distress noises through pursed lips that my dad used to tell me would lure small mustelids without fail... it didn't work. So we advanced slowly to the point where it had jumped out of the verge- trouble was we weren't 100% sure exactly where this was. The snow had melted in parts and drips from the tree above had left little indentations that may or may not have been small mammal tracks. But we were reasonably confident this was the location (right). Maybe there's a bit of body drag and prints from a couple of bounds? What do you think?

Ric Morris @skull_bloke
Thrilling sight of a weasel *Mustela nivalis* running across this footpath at about 1610 hrs, within sight of Mount Cook, NZ. #invasivespecies. I'm waiting for it to show itself again in the rocks but not very hopeful.



This sighting was of particular interest since my local friend Hilary (who, it seems, also has weasels in her woodpile!) had tipped me off last summer about a fresh roadkill weasel not far away from this location, a little nearer the A488. Naturally I raced over there as soon as I heard; unfortunately that animal had sustained severe head injuries and was already attracting the attention of slugs. But as I've said before, no weasel is wasted by the @Skull_Bloke and (once I find where I put the jamjar it's rotting in), hopefully some of the post-cranial bones can still be salvaged for the Morris osteology reference collection.

The number of times we have walked and driven along that road, in all seasons and at all times of day over more than eighteen years can't be counted. The live mammals I have seen along the road most often are undoubtedly grey squirrels *Sciurus*



Approximate location and route taken by weasel, photographed the following day after further thawing

carolinensis by day and badgers *Meles meles* by night, with a fair few wood mice, *Apodemus sylvaticus*, bouncing across the road in the headlights, but never, ever, any of the smaller mustelids. And of course, now, just a few weeks later, we're *still* full of anticipation as we approach the spot, almost feeling cheated as we fail, yet again, to see our weasel in winter.

Ric Morris

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Tweet from our NZ venture in 2018, as 'liked' by TV's Tim Vincent



Squeamish? Look away - Nothing to see here

#NoWeaselsWasted

Greatest camera trap tweets of 2020 part 4 Tweets by @PinemartensUK

#pinemarten

Original idea & Twitter framegrabs by @Skull_Bloke



Our quarterly round-up of Stuart's greatest camera trap clip tweets from home and away during September 2020 to January 2021, for our members who don't use Twitter or other social media. You don't need to be a Twitter user to enjoy these; each framegrabbed image hides a hyperlink to Stu's own Twitter account- just press Ctrl and click on the tweet to enjoy each clip and many more in full. Make sure your sound is turned up too! *[Be warned: even more #pinemartens than usual...]* **Ric**

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK

Always nice to see an otter or 2 in front of a #cameratrapp within hours of setting it up. The pairs of glowing eyes in the background remind me of Jawas in #Starwars

There are few #pinemartens on the #IsleofMull (they aren't native to the island), but the otters kept me busy.



258 views 0:23 / 0:33

7:18 PM · Sep 28, 2020 · Twitter Web App

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK

1st clips of a #pinemarten preying on grey squirrels in #Shropshire. Not the clearest footage; it took me a while to work out what it was carrying (2 other cameras facing the opposite way failed to trigger).

@BBCSpringwatch @WildlifeTrusts @Mammal_Society @vincentwildlife



5K views 0:22 / 0:32

5:30 PM · Oct 3, 2020 · Twitter Web App

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK

2 #pinemarten clips on #cameratrapp checks today. This one has appeared on cameras over 5 miles apart repeatedly & is crossing open farmland to get between woodland areas. That's a huge area for an animal the size of a housecat to cover without being spotted!

@Mammal_Society



4K views 0:03 / 0:10

7:41 PM · Oct 8, 2020 · Twitter Web App

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK

I was looking forward to getting back to this patch of honey fungi once it was ready for picking and eating. But a muntjac beat me to it.



484 views 0:09 / 0:10

8:31 PM · Oct 16, 2020 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK

This young fox has been practicing her #pinemarten style climbing skills in front of several #cameratraps this month. Lots of fox footage now, more this month than in the previous 8 months combined.

@Mammal_Society



304 views 0:04 / 0:10

10:20 AM · Oct 22, 2020 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK

As it is #NationalMammalWeek, here are my favourite #pinemarten video clips recorded on #cameratrapp this year.

#wildlifephotography @WildlifeTrusts @shropswildlife @Mammal_Society



506 views 0:33 / 0:34

5:13 PM · Oct 26, 2020 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK

A first for #Shropshire...two #pinemartens on #cameratrapp. Both martens (a male and a female) have shown up separately over the last four years, but never at the same spot at the same time. Breeding season too I hope!

@Mammal_Society @naturepsy @BBCSpringwatch @WildlifeTrusts



6.2K views 0:01 / 0:12

7:14 PM · Oct 28, 2020 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK

Another #pinemarten on #cameratrapp in the early hours today. Good timing too...it is the 1st time I've checked this camera for 4 weeks. This is in another area to the last 2, so at least 17 have been recorded in Shropshire since July 2015.

@WildlifeTrusts @BBCSpringwatch



444 views 0:10 / 0:14

7:09 PM · Oct 29, 2020 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK

The closest things to ghosts I've had on #cameratrapp in Shropshire are #pinemartens. They are so elusive that when people do see them for a fleeting glance, they often question whether they actually saw one or not!

#Halloween



340 views 0:00 / 0:10

5:26 PM · Oct 31, 2020 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK

The trail that #pinemartens were using all summer in the @ShropHillsAONB is still a productive place for this #cameratrapp. Great to see the martens staying healthy and now with lovely winter pelage. They seem to be doing well.

@Mammal_Society @CJWildlife @WildlifeTrusts



693 views 0:07 / 0:10

5:56 PM · Nov 8, 2020 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK

Name this animal. Sometimes the wildlife gets too close to the #cameratrapp! My 1st thought was cat but the eyes don't look right.

Recorded in remote oak woodland in the @ShropHillsAONB @Mammal_Society



573 views 0:20 / 0:31

8:22 PM · Nov 16, 2020 · Twitter Web App

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK

Some slightly shaky footage of an otter with cub recorded when I popped up to Scotland before #Lockdown2 began. It took a while to find them but it was well worth the effort. #naturetherapy



365 views 0:19 / 0:36

5:37 PM · Nov 20, 2020 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK

Martens in the mist. Despite the wet weather, #pinemartens are still active at this site in the @ShropHillsAONB. It has been so damp that the #cameratrapp lenses fog up, so some clips are easily missed.

@WildlifeTrusts @BBCSpringwatch @Mammal_Society



425 views 0:07 / 0:09

11:24 PM · Nov 21, 2020 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK

Another nice #pinemarten trail found in Shropshire. Not a bad start to the week!



330 views 0:07 / 0:12

8:49 PM · Nov 23, 2020 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK

A very rare occurrence on this #cameratrapp this week: a #pinemarten almost stopped to eat some of my homemade, sugar free peanut butter, but decided against it! Not a bad start to the #weekend though.

@ShropHillsAONB @NaturalEngland @ShropsWildlife



216 views 0:05 / 0:13

9:14 PM · Nov 27, 2020 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK

My favourite #Shropshire #pinemarten clip from 2019 vs the best from 2020. This year might not have been great, but, looking on the bright side, the pine marten videos have become more frequent and better quality! These are 2 different individuals at 2 different sites #lovenature



784 views 0:14 / 0:19

5:08 PM · Nov 28, 2020 · Twitter Web App

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK

This is probably the longest clip of a polecat I've had on #cameratrapp in 5 years. Despite polecats being more common than #pinemartens in Shropshire, I get more records of the latter.



307 views 0:10 / 0:12

10:54 PM · Dec 1, 2020 · Twitter for Android

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Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK
 Love this #cameratrapp clip of a grey squirrel and roe deer both in view at the same time. Considering the number of times both species trigger the camera, I've only had both at the same time twice.



8:46 PM · Dec 9, 2020 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK
 This impressive goshawk made up for the lack of #pinemarten activity on #cameratrapp. I forget how big they are!
 #lovenature



9:10 PM · Dec 11, 2020 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK
 #Pinemartens have a particularly bouncy movement on the ground. This one looks like she has springs on her paws!
 @Mammal_Society



4:49 PM · Dec 13, 2020 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK
 Only the 3rd weasel I've recorded in 2020 so far. Like the other mustelids, they don't spend very long posing for my #cameratrapp!



4:41 PM · Dec 15, 2020 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK
 A young roe buck has made a few appearances on this #cameratrapp lately. Good to see the local roe deer looking in good condition, they are obviously finding plenty of food.
 #lovenature #wildlife



5:12 PM · Dec 21, 2020 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK
 Ever wonder why there are so many grey squirrels around? More #pinemartens needed!
 #cameratrapp #wildlife



7:35 PM · Dec 22, 2020 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK
 A #pinemarten checking out my Shropshire mascot in Scotland back in October. Not sure she found Chris very impressive.
 #HappyNewYear2021 #cameratrapp #wildlifephotography



2:24 PM · Jan 1, 2021 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds @PinemartensUK
 Which animal seems more shy in front of the #cameratrapp? #fox #badger or #pinemarten
 The date syrup I put out here attracted a lot of interest.
 #WildlifeWednesday



6:10 PM · Jan 6, 2021 · Twitter for Android

Stuart Edmunds

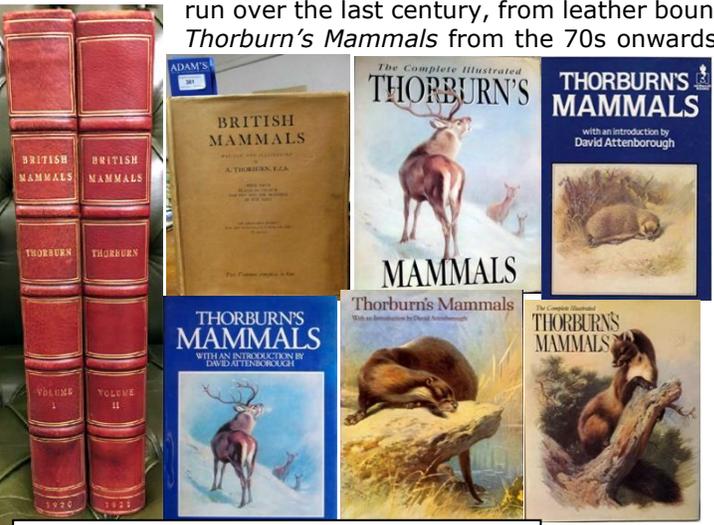
Vintage and historic mammal literature Part 2

by Ric Morris



In the last Newsletter we looked at some inspirational mammal reference books from my own youth. For this issue we will delve even further back into the collective consciousness of British mammalogists... but with added foxes...

Arguably the benchmark for late 19th and early 20th century mammal illustration was set by Archibald Thorburn FZS (1860-1935) who published his *British Mammals* in two volumes during 1920-21. This book has had an impressive print run over the last century, from leather bound early double volume editions to cheaper single volume reprints as *Thorburn's Mammals* from the 70s onwards. It seems to no longer be in print, but a quick search of the net reveals a wide variety of dust jacket designs featuring red deer, otter, hedgehog and pine marten. The modern introduction explains the various taxonomic anachronisms, highlighting the changes in both generic and specific names across a range of mammals; *Canis vulpes*... *Meles taxus*... *Mus minutus*... *Lutra vulgaris* and so on. You can probably work out which mammals these are!



While this is a beautifully illustrated book, it is not a modern identification guide and neither is it an entirely reliable account of behaviour, habits and diet of British mammals. It's a century old popular snapshot of mammal lore and casual observations, some of which date back half a century before that. It's of its time, with numerous quaint anachronisms, referring to the fox, for example, as 'Reynard' and less happily as a 'beast of the chase', but still a very



Far right: Thorburn's somewhat thin-muzzled fox (with foxgloves and rabbit skull) painted in 1918 for the *British Mammals* (aka *Thorburn's Mammals*) collection.

interesting work relevant to the history of the study of British mammals.
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 And don't forget the Pine Marten Project page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/shropspinemartens/>
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Also well known for his bird (especially gamebirds) and landscape paintings, the illustrations for this book weren't Thorburn's only depictions of mammals. He painted foxes in numerous other situations for other projects: with a litter; in the snow (several different treatments); scavenging a dead pheasant or deer; fleeing from shepherd's dogs, and inevitably, studies in death.



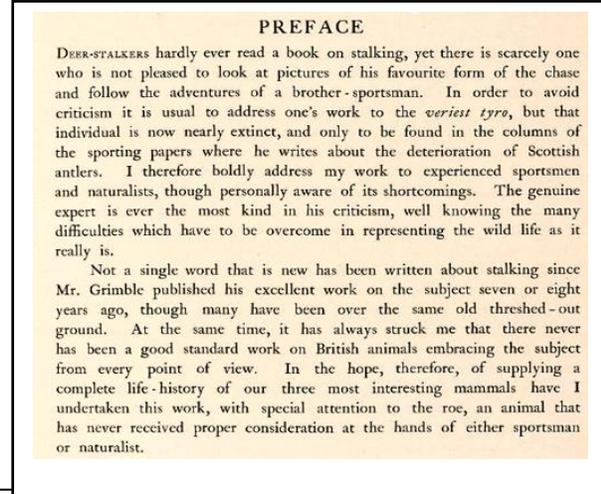
Just a small selection of Thorburn fox studies that turned up from an internet search; unfortunately I haven't been able to find a comprehensive website listing all his work and their titles. Far right – look at that red deer skull!



"In 1930 it was reported that Mr Thorburn, the well-known Surrey naturalist and bird artist, steadfastly refuses to install electricity at his lovely home in Hascombe. As a painter he relies solely on natural light, working long hours indeed in the summer months, but much shorter ones in the brief days of winter. Just occasionally he resorts to the use of oil lamps, especially if drawing mice in the dimness of his garden shed".

From www.exploringsurreyspast.org.uk

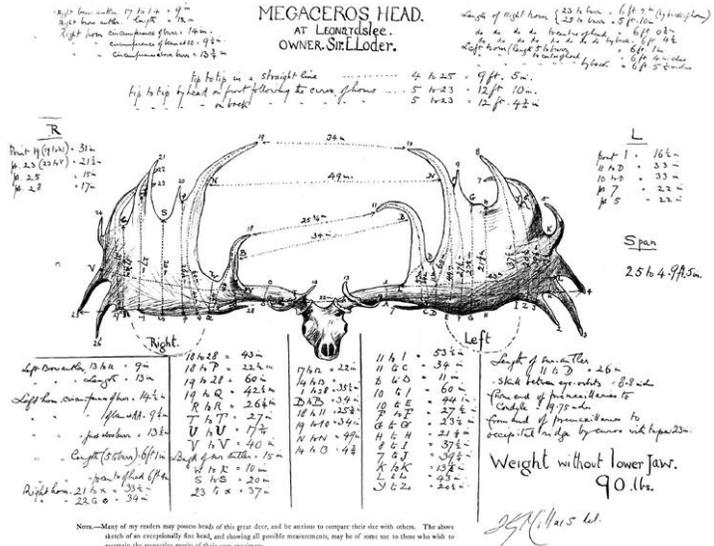
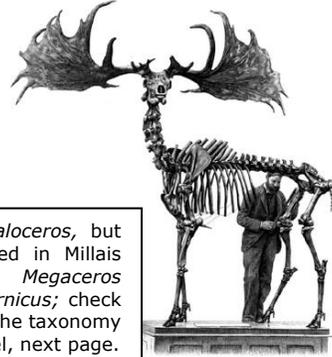
As the reference to 'beast of the chase' in Thorburn's *Mammals* may suggest, many early published works on British mammals (and birds, though perhaps to a lesser extent), have some kind of hunting or so-called 'field-sport' roots. A most interesting book came to my notice last year thanks to deer enthusiast and SMG member Nigel Woodall; namely *British Deer and their Horns*, by John Guille Millais FZS, published circa 1897. This is at heart a deerstalkers' book and truly of its time; prices for original collectors' copies seem to range between £250 and well over a thousand. I have to set aside my traditional pedantry regarding horn and antler confusion to even discuss the book's title (*of course* deer don't have horns; and you'd never say 'look at the antlers on that cow', but even up to the mid- 20th century it's surprising how often the mistake was made by people who should have known better).



Cover, above left, and an extract from Millais's *Preface* (above right), emphasizing the book's intended appeal to field sports enthusiasts.

The nit-picking above makes me sound very ungrateful for Nigel's kindness in sending me a DVD copy of the book. That is very far from the case; I'm in his debt as the work is a remarkable document of the variety in late Victorian fallow *Dama dama*, red *Cervus elaphus* and roe deer *Capreolus capreolus* antlers, both park-fed and wild stalked animals. You can well imagine that as a mammal osteologist, I'd be in awe of the amount of antler detail and utterly delighted by the period illustrations– you'd be correct. But arguably the most spectacular content of the book is Chapter One, dealing with *Extinct British Deer* (well, Irish deer in particular; another period anachronism!)

Megaloceros, but named in Millais as *Megaceros hibernicus*; check out the taxonomy panel, next page.

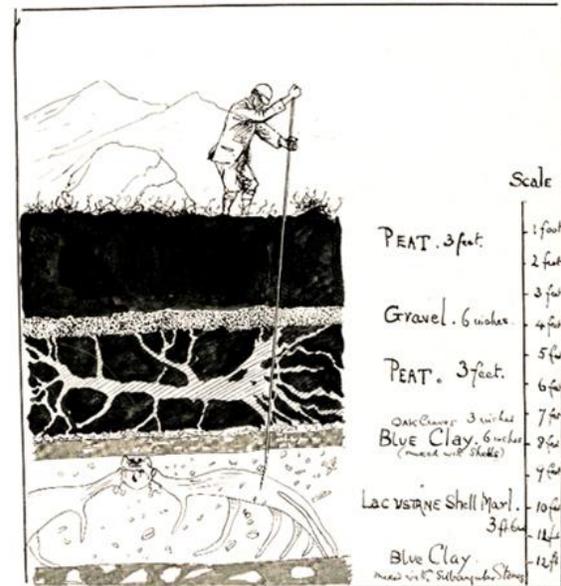


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Taxonomy of the great Irish deer, *Megaloceros giganteus*

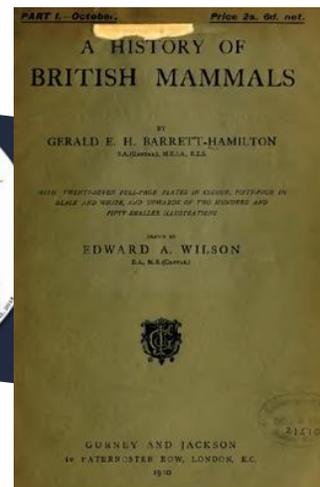
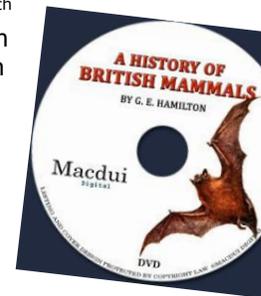
In early literature, e.g. John Hart's [1825 description](#) of a skeleton in the Museum of the Royal Dublin Society, the deer is referred to as *Cervus megaceros*, although it's now known to be more closely related to the modern fallow deer *Dama dama*, than the red deer's *Cervus* genus. In Millais, it is referred to as *Megaceros hibernicus*, yet the name *Megaceros* is now used to describe a genus of hornwort bryophyte and confusingly, *Megacerus* is a genus of beetle. As with the Thorburn work's reference to *Canis vulpes*, etc, it's clear that taxonomic nomenclature has moved on in 125 years. The great deer's [Wikipedia entry](#) states: **The type and only species named in the description being *Megaloceros antiquorum*, based on Irish remains now considered to belong to *M. giganteus*, making the former a junior synonym. The original description was considered by Adrian Lister [who worked locally on the excavation of the Shropshire mammoth] in 1987 to be inadequate for a taxonomic definition. In 1828 Brookes published an expanded list in the form of a catalogue for an upcoming auction, which included the Latin phrase "Cornibus deciduis palmatis" as a description of the remains. The 1828 publication was approved by International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN) in 1977 as an available publication for the basis of zoological nomenclature. Adrian Lister in 1987 judged that "the phrase "Cornibus deciduis palmatis" constitutes a definition sufficient under the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature article 12 to validate *Megaloceros*."** The original spelling of *Megaloceros* was never used after its original publication. In 1844, Richard Owen named another synonym of the Irish elk, including it within the newly named subgenus *Megaceros*, *Cervus (Megaceros) hibernicus*. This has been suggested to be derived from another junior synonym of the Irish elk described by J. Hart in 1825, *Cervus megaceros* [see above!]. Despite being a junior synonym, *Megaloceros* remained in obscurity and *Megaceros* became the common genus name for the taxon. The combination *Megaceros giganteus* was in use by 1871. George Gaylord Simpson in 1945 revived the original *Megaloceros* name, which became progressively more widely used, until a taxonomic decision in 1989 by the ICZN confirmed the priority of *Megaloceros* over *Megaceros*, and *Megaloceros* to be the correct spelling. [End] There you go. No one said it would be straightforward!

The intriguing graphic on the right is captioned *Showing mode of finding the heads, their position and the strata in which they are generally embedded*. Millais offers further explanation in the text: "Most of the heads [i.e. skulls and antlers] are found at a depth of five to nine feet [approx. 1.5 – 2.7 metres]- not in the peat itself as is generally supposed, but in the shell-marl. Professor Ball, in his description of the Fossil Mammalia of Ireland, tells us that they have been recovered from the shell-marl under fifty feet [15.2 metres] of peat. Their position is generally ascertained by means of probing irons, which are forced into the earth until the position of the head and antlers is discovered. Mr W. Williams, the Dublin naturalist, was induced to make ... researches in... the bog at Ballybethag, nine miles south east of Dublin in the summers of 1876 and 1877 [when] 26 heads and three complete skeletons [were extracted]. The profession of the man who has been employed by Mr Williams to search for them is probably unique. By constant practice he is enabled to tell from the ring of the metal exactly what kind of substance it has come into contact with. A different sound is emitted when a stone, bone or horn is struck, and... so delicate is this expert's hearing that he can tell whether it is the horn of a large or small animal... The man who searches for the Megaceros heads uses a rod about 60 feet [sic! 18.3 metres!] in length. First of all he takes a survey of the bog and from long experience knows where to commence his probing in what seems a likely spot. Should the iron strike stone or gravel he knows from the gritty feel, whilst horn gives a dull thud and by turning the rod round and round the searcher is able to tell of what nature is the substance he has struck". I can't help but be impressed by that (and envious).



We have strayed far into paleontology territory since first encountering *Megaloceros*; it's time to return to the 19th century, and thanks to 21st century technology it is possible to access many more vintage mammal texts digitally.

An eBay seller by the name of *macduidigital* has a comprehensive online shop where he offers over 600 DVD and disc sets ranging from vintage radio shows to scanned Victorian self-help manuals. Of particular interest (naturally) are the discs of 19th and early 20th century flora and fauna books from around the world. My own purchase from this seller was a disc of *A History of British Mammals* by G.E. Barrett-Hamilton (1910). This work was begun with some collaboration from Martin Hinton and issued in monthly parts, intended to build to three volumes, one each for flying mammals, land mammals and aquatic mammals. Rather curiously when you work your way through the PDFs you notice that the pages are numbered consecutively between installments, there is usually a break in mid-sentence, immediately before the back cover, then the next issue begins (a month later!) with a cover and a contents page, and the subsequent page completes the sentence.

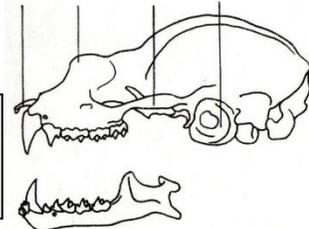
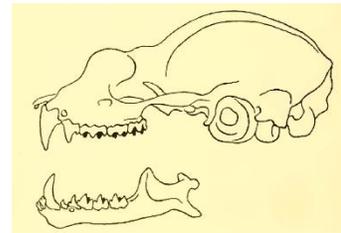


Unfortunately this ambitious work was never completed; only the bats, insectivores and some rodents were ever published. The ungulate and carnivore species accounts were unwritten; the

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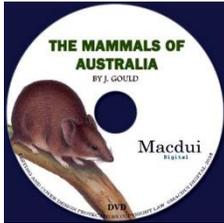
aquatic mammals (Pinnepedia and Cetacea) not begun. Hamilton died in 1914 aged only 42; while Hinton's name was later linked to (although unlikely to have been responsible for) the infamous Piltdown Man hoax, after his own death in 1961.

One small observation (possibly only of interest to myself!), is the remarkable similarity between Edward A. Wilson's bat skull illustrations in Barrett-Hamilton and the uncredited ones in Lawrence & Brown's *Mammals of Britain Their Tracks Trails and Signs* (1967/73). Apart from the latter's use of indication lines to points of ID, and lack of tooth cusp shadings, there are only tiny, very subtle differences between the two sets of drawings. I'm certainly not alleging the images were deliberately reused, but it's clear that the L&B artist at least redrew their illustrations from the Wilson originals rather than from specimens. I'm uncomfortable and feel slightly disloyal even mentioning this; after all, Lawrence & Brown has been my bible for almost 50 years. But I was always a little curious as to why so few of the illustrations in both editions are credited.



Right: Greater horseshoe bat skulls, *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*.
Top- Wilson, from the Barrett-Hamilton work.
Bottom- uncredited, from Lawrence & Brown.

Rhinolophus ferrumequinum



Another classic work available from macduidigital is the three-volume set of John Gould's *Mammals of Australia*, published between 1845 and 1863. It contains 182 lithographic illustrations by artist H. C. Richter from original sketches by Gould and his artist wife Elizabeth. Gould himself was a contemporary of Darwin and a noted ornithologist; it seems that he examined many of the bird specimens collected by Darwin in the Galapagos, correctly identifying what Darwin had initially understood to be "blackbirds and gross-bills", as finches. This important correction obviously opened the door to Darwin's development of thought, in turn leading to the formation of the theory of evolution by natural selection. The Goulds had intended that the two-year Australian mission (1838-40) would be solely devoted to birds, however it became impossible for them to ignore the mammals. Their stay must have been astonishingly productive both in research and artwork, since it gathered sufficient material for seven volumes of *Birds of Australia*, three volumes of *Mammals of Australia* and *A Monograph of the Macropodidae or Family of Kangaroos*.



In reality even the earliest settlers in Australia 40,000 years ago had negative effects on the fauna, leading to extinctions. Shamefully, in excess of 54 more species of Australian wildlife (probably many more) have become extinct since the arrival of Europeans in the late 18th century. This work is therefore extremely valuable in documenting many of these at a time only fifty years after this desecration escalated.

Arguably the most infamous mammal extinction in Australia, the thylacine was originally found on the mainland as well as Tasmania.

A final brief mention of another vintage work, this time documenting 19th Century North American fauna. The Scottish naval surgeon and naturalist Sir John Richardson (1787 -1865) accompanied Sir John Franklin on his first two overland expeditions to the Canadian Arctic between 1819 and 1827, and later led an expedition to try to discover [Franklin's fate](#) after he went missing on his third voyage. The *Fauna Boreali-Americana* is a four-volume work but only the first (1829) deals with mammals. It's the earliest of the five works covered in this article, and some of the engraving illustrations are quite melodramatic!



If you wish to consult any of the vintage works featured in this article, both the Biodiversity Heritage Library and the Internet Archive have scans to stream or download- click on the hyperlinks in the box on the right (sometimes the Internet Archive draws content from other sites). There is no need to actually purchase a disc, since these sites probably host the very same scans that have been sold so profitably on eBay!

Biodiversity Heritage Library	Internet Archive
British Mammals Thorburn	British Mammals Thorburn
British Deer Millais	British Deer Millais
British Mammals Barrett-Hamilton	British Mammals Barrett-Hamilton
Mammals of Australia Gould	Mammals of Australia Gould
Fauna Boreali-Americana Richardson	Fauna Boreali-Americana Richardson

Ric Morris @Skull_Bloke

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A new patch for 2021

by Robin Bennett



After nine really enjoyable years in Much Wenlock, it was time for a change. Next stop, Shrewsbury! Don't ask me how, but somehow we managed to sell and buy during the first lockdown and we've been in our new house in Castlefields, right next to (or under- the floods last week were pretty exciting!) the River Severn, since September. A new house means a new local wildlife patch to explore. Watch out Shrewsbury mammals, I'm on your track.

"Weir" in Shrewsbury are we? There is a clue in there somewhere! We're right next to Castlefields weir, a spot many readers will be familiar with as it is popular with naturalists in the autumn, especially, as the Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar* head upstream to spawn. I've been photographing the salmon at the weir for years and seemed quite odd (but amazing) in November to be able to walk fifty steps out of my door and down to the weir to watch them. Catherine and I were even taking cups of tea down or viewing from a tree-house in the garden.



As usual, I bumped into a number of SMG members watching the salmon attempt to leap the man-made obstacle. I also got to know the Environment Agency salmon expert, and Shrewsbury local, Chris Bainger, who explained that he was working with environmental studies students to ID individual fish from photos. It was interesting to see on *Winterwatch* this season that Chris Conroy has also been visually IDing cock salmon in the River Ness, Scotland.

I helped Chris B. with his project and, along with dedicated salmon photographer Brian Brookes, he was able to determine that individuals were stuck at the weir for three days or more at times. This new science is helping to formulate plans to free the Severn and other rivers from hurdles which stop or slow down the salmon returning to spawn. The salmon's gain will be the photographer's loss, of course, if the leaping ceases to be a spectacle; but anything that helps to conserve this incredible British fish should be supported.

Another interesting visitor this year was Jack Perks (<https://www.jackperksphotography.com/>); he's a regular on TV and the first person to photograph all UK freshwater fish (I believe). I spent an afternoon with Jack, showing him the best spots, and he's in this photo (right) with Brian.

Being closer, I had the time to be creative and try a few different photographic techniques this year, including the use of a mini action cam at eye-level with the salmon. It's a good job I tied it to my foot with fishing wire- the salmon below beached and rolled back into the river taking my camera with it!



Back to the mammals... Enough of the fishy diversion, what about the Shrewsbury mammals? Surely a town centre location will be no good for mammals? Well, for the first time, we have resident grey squirrels *Sciurus carolinensis* in the garden although they may not stay too long given the interest our cats have shown in them. The squirrels were perhaps expected, but I was more surprised when I started to smell the tell-tale signs of foxes *Vulpes vulpes* around the house. A trailcam left in the garden picked up the fox the first night I left it out. Result! In fact, we've got more than one. Very, very shy and usually utterly nocturnal but we did see two over the river in the daytime last week after presumably spending the night making this year's fox cubs.



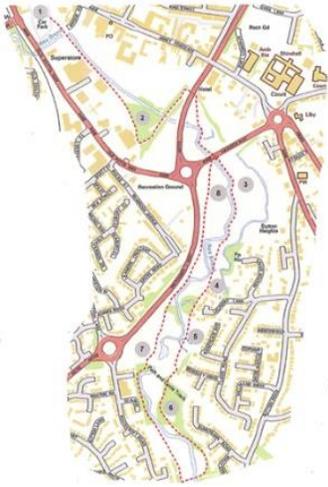
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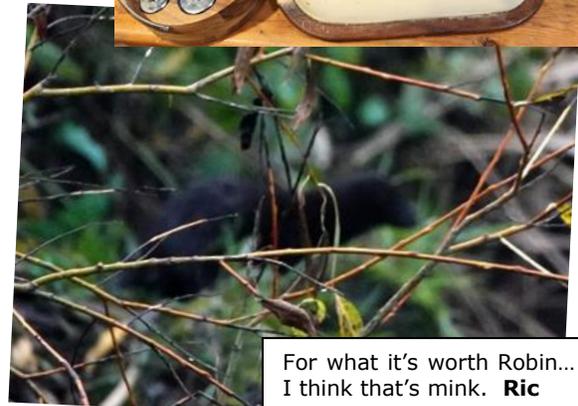
Hedgehogs *Erinaceus europaeus* were our next slightly surprising visitors. We're right in the middle of town and so finding a hedgehog on the pavement outside our house caused us a double-take. The next hedgehog we happened across was in the garden. We'd seen it visit the rough patch at the end of the garden on the trailcam. We heard it before we saw it and were concerned enough about its size to weigh it. Heading into winter, the rule of thumb is that hedgehogs need to weigh 600 gms to survive. This one was tiny, so we dropped him off at Cuan House Wildlife Rescue in Wenlock to be looked after through to spring.



The Shrewsbury resident I'm hoping to get to know best is the otter *Lutra lutra*. The Reabrook flows through the centre of town, into the Severn, and is famous for its kingfishers and frequent but irregular sightings of otters. There is a loop walk which Shrewsbury Town Council maintains (see the Shrewsbury Town Council website and search for Rea Brook Valley Circular Walk or [click here](#) to download a really good PDF leaflet. I've walked it several times now, either with the family or very early or very late in the day looking for otters or their tell-tale signs. Only once, so far, have I had a possible "in the flesh" sighting. It was a glimpse, a tantalising peep through a tangle of fallen logs, and I'm still not sure if it was a mink or a small otter. I took 15 blurry photos and this was the best - look in the middle of the frame and see for yourself. The colour says "mink" to me, but the tail looked ottery. Frustrating!



This is what I'm hoping to eventually see - this is the rear-end of an otter I had been watching in Ludlow before lockdown stopped me travelling.



For what it's worth Robin... I think that's mink. Ric

What I *am* sure of is the number of footprints, mudslides and piles of spraint I've found on the Reabrook. Once the river levels go down, I'll leave a couple of trailcams in place and see who is leaving the messages.



The final mammal on my local patch radar is another mustelid and perhaps a surprise to many. Badgers *Meles meles* live in Shrewsbury town centre. I know- who would have thought it! I saw them last year when I staked out a car park where foxes had been seen, but I've yet to see them in Castlefields. It's great to have a challenge... so watch this space!

Robin Bennett

Obligatory bones nonsense: The first ever SMG online bones workshop by Ric Morris



As you've already seen from [Heads Up!](#), I will be presenting a two-hour online bones event from 1000 hrs (10am) on Saturday 13th February 2021. The short notice is really due to me finally grasping the nettle of online talks; if I don't do it now, I never will! You already know I've done all-day SMG Bones Workshops before, as well as two-day workshops for other societies and organisations; isn't this just a cut-down version? Well, yes and no. I am devising a lot of new material and taking a slightly different approach to address the important questions *Is this actually a mammal bone?* and *Why is this different from a bird bone?* I'll concentrate on bones from medium sized to large mammals- rabbit, squirrel, polecat-sized upwards. Nothing too tiny.



We'll also look at characteristics of found bones to try to determine features which locate the bones in particular parts of the skeleton. This is always the most important ID issue; in other words, you can't confidently identify a random bone as having belonged to a particular mammal if you don't know from where in the skeleton it originated. One of my favourite reference works, I.W. Cornwall's *Bones for the Archaeologist* (1956) makes the exact same point in rather more academic language, and when I read that chapter, I confess it was quite an enlightenment. The good news is that this event will be FREE to existing SMG members; non-members will pay a tenner, to include a year's membership. Registration details will be issued via email very soon, and posted on the SMG Members' Facebook page. Book early!

Ric Morris

Tales from the riverbank

All photos by Shelley Eve



I hope you all enjoyed Shelley's stoat photographs on Page 5 of the newsletter. We were chatting about mammal photography on Facebook Messenger for a while after I'd asked permission to run the stoat article, and during the chat she shared these stunning water vole *Arvicola amphibius* and water shrew *Neomys fodiens* photos with me. Way too good not to share with SMG members; so here they are, with Shelley's permission. So what's the story behind *Rhino & Co*? Well Shelley is a former rhino keeper at Port Lympne Zoo as well as being a 2013 photography graduate. She sells prints from her [Facebook page](#) so please pop by and give it a Like. But be warned that there aren't many rhino pics on it anymore!

Ric



All photos © Shelley Eve / Rhino & Co

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Online recorded mammal talks

Researched & hyperlinked by Ric



[Hybridisation & Scottish Wildcats: Keri Langridge - YouTube](#) Streamed on 9th November 2020
An Oxfordshire Mammal Group talk. Keri discusses the drivers of interbreeding across wildcat populations in the hope of understanding how we can prevent hybridisation in the future.



[Lundy's Seal Secrets - YouTube](#) Streamed on 1st December 2020
A Lundy Field Society talk. Learn about the seals on the north Devon island of Lundy, in this webinar with Sue Sayer and Kate Williams from the Cornwall Seal Group Research Trust.



[Dormouse Detectives training session - YouTube](#) Streamed on 3rd December 2020
Online training session for the Stepping Stones Project's 'Dormouse Detectives' survey in south Shropshire. Training is delivered jointly between the National Trust and the Shropshire Dormouse Group.



[Dormouse hibernation Leo Gubert - YouTube](#) Streamed on 9th December 2020
A Nottinghamshire Dormouse Group talk. Leo is a Highways England Ecologist and PhD Researcher at the University of Exeter; he shares knowledge of the secret lives of hazel dormice in hibernation.



[Bat Roosts in Trees: Keith Cohen - YouTube](#) Streamed on 13th December 2020
An Oxfordshire Mammal Group talk. Keith Cohen reveals that the number of bat roosting sites in trees is very much greater than previously thought, describing how to identify potential roost sites, and how modern technology can help.



[Yukon Beringia Interpretive Centre - The Life of Zhùr via Facebook](#) Streamed on 21st December 2020
In 2016 a 50,000 year old wolf pup mummy was found in the Klondike goldfields near Dawson City, Yukon. Mummified remains of ancient animals in North America are incredibly rare. Studying this complete pup allows us to reconstruct how wolves lived during the Ice Age in ways that would not be possible by looking at fossil bones alone.



[Badger Cull - unscientific, expensive, and immoral: Dr Iain McGill - YouTube](#) Streamed on 12th January
An Oxfordshire Mammal Group talk. Dr Iain McGill, a veterinary surgeon and Director of the Prion Group discusses the science behind the Badger Cull, and explains why this policy is bad for badgers, cows, farmers- and taxpayers.



[SMG AGM and talk Hedgehog Heroes of Shropshire - YouTube](#) Streamed on 23rd January 2021
Our first ever virtual AGM! Kathryn Jones, our new Committee member and Shropshire Wildlife Trust Trainee Hedgehog Officer describes her work in raising the hedgehog's profile in two key Shropshire villages.



Events message from t'Committee



The Shropshire Mammal Group Committee looks forward to the return of our normal events & meetings in 2021 and hope you and your loved ones all keep safe and well.

See you on the other side!

Stuart, Ric and the SMG Committee

BREAKING NEWS BREAKING NEWS BREAKING NEWS BREAKING NEWS

**SMG Bones Workshop to be held online from 1000 hrs on Saturday 13th February 2021!
Watch social media and email for details of how to log on for the event! (No chips or cake will be available...)**

And finally...

Thanks once more to all our contributors for your fine articles. Just space for a quick plug for a Shropshire event with an international appeal: the **Darwin Shrewsbury Festival** runs from Tuesday 9th to Wednesday 17th February 2021, entirely online. Here's the [programme of events](#): plenty of science and natural history; my own personal highlight will be my online friend Katrina van Grouw's talk, 1600 hrs on Saturday 13th: *Unnatural Selection: Evolution at the hand of man.* (Now you know why the bones workshop's in the morning!) Read more about Katrina in SMGN39 Summer 2019's Culture Supplement, or via her website www.unfeatheredbird.com.



Right... SMGN46 is coming up! You could write something for it; remember it's a short lead-in time once again! We want it out by the end of March if possible! So don't hold back... Get scribing... you know it makes sense! Keep safe, see you soon, be good. Signing off for now. **PS: Get your records in!**

Ric Morris, @Skull_Bloke

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