

Herefordshire Mammal Group 2015 Bromyard Downs Common Project

Herefordshire Mammal Group (HMG) have continued their support for the second year with The Bromyard Downs Common Association (BDCA) and Herefordshire Wildlife Trust's three year Project. The objective of HMG is to create an awareness of mammals and involve the local community with surveying and monitoring to further develop the aims of The Bromyard Downs Common Project.

The primary focus for the second year of HMG's involvement in the Project was directed at basic survey training for volunteers to cover:- Dormice; Small Mammals ; and Bats. The skills initiated would then empower local volunteers to repeat the surveys in future years.

Dormouse

HMG member and Dormouse Licence holder Joe Allsopp took on the co-ordination and training to survey for this charming mammal. Although locals report sightings of dormice on the Common, no records exist, and no actual targeted surveys have ever been done there. A day's training was organised on April 25th 2015 and Joe instructed a small group of 5 volunteers who initially became au fey with the distinctive way in which dormice gnaw hazelnut shells. The second part of the training involved setting dormice tubes along branches in areas of potential habitat. Dormice are protected by law, but non-licensed people can check the tubes up until the first dormouse is found (this is only at sites that have no previous recordings of dormice.)

The Project funded some tubes and the volunteers helped allocate them to two areas on the Common, including an area of old coppice. Volunteers also offered to initiate the first monthly check.

Small mammals

Dave Smith, Co-ordinator of Herefordshire Mammal Group followed up the 2014 mammal trapping training by loaning out the traps to volunteers and Herefordshire Wildlife Trust members to further develop their skill levels and accumulate further mammal recordings.

Bats

Bat Ecologist and HMG membership secretary Louise Scott co-ordinated the volunteer training to survey for bats on the Bromyard Downs. Louise arranged for a trainer from The Bat Conservation Trust to present an evening of bat detector training for volunteers to develop their listening skills; and to introduce them to The National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP). The Bromyard Downs Common has become a new site as of 2015 to undertake the National Bat Monitoring Programme's Field Survey. Louise initiated the inclusion within this Programme so that volunteers; - could attain a good level of basic training; would have a set methodology to follow; would have an annual continuation of the monitoring survey; and could contribute results which could impact on a local and national level.

Rebecca Collins (HMG founder) led the training of 16 volunteers, primarily unskilled with no previous knowledge, on behalf of The Bat Conservation Trust. The project funded the hire of a room on the Brockhampton Estate which borders The Bromyard Downs Common, and the evening ended with listening to and watching a lively display of bats around the buildings and ponds of the National Trust estate grounds.

The Bromyard Downs Common Association Bioblitz 2015

June 26th 2015 saw the BDCA Bioblitz event. Dave Smith set up Herefordshire Mammal Group's stall with samples of mammal paraphernalia and literature. He gave a talk about small mammal ecology to a group of primary school children along with some parents (around 30+ people). He also talked about live mammal trapping and demonstrated how to bait the Longworth traps. All the children were able to have a go preparing the traps with fresh hay for bedding material along with a variety of sustenance items which helped to lure the small mammals into the overnight refuges. 8 traps were set around the campsite. A series of 20 traps were further distributed on the common and around a pond located to the south east.

Joe Allsopp gave a talk to a group of school children (#30+) about dormouse ecology and initiated a hunt for signs of these adorable mammals.

Louise Scott introduced 4 of the Bromyard Downs Bat Volunteers who had undergone training to the survey transect route that would take 1 ½ hours to survey. The route had been devised to set methodology with 12 walks and 12 stopping points taking in the northern and southern areas of The Downs. The group would record bat passes from Pipistrelles at the stopping points and passes from big bats (Noctules / Serotines / Leislars) whilst walking. From a safety point of view it was advisable to do the walk initially in daytime and the Bioblitz provided an ideal opportunity to do so.

The volunteers then joined a larger group (#18+) led by Lucy Fay, Ecologist and HMG Member, for an introductory talk on bats and an after-dark bat detecting session.

National Bat Monitoring Programme Field Survey 1

The first Field Survey transect route was undertaken on the July 11th 2015. 5 beginners honed their listening skills as Louise Scott guided the bat volunteers around The Bromyard Downs providing insights into assisting with the identification of species encountered. The distinctive two-part call of the Noctule bat was heard within a few minutes of starting the survey, and a fantastic aerial display of Common pipistrelles was witnessed and recorded by the group shortly thereafter.

National Bat Monitoring Programme Field Survey 2

The second Field Survey was undertaken on the July 18th 2015. The same transect route was followed by 6 bat volunteers who had been practicing their listening skills.

Results

Volunteer bat trainees were lucky enough to listen to and observe Daubenton's Bats; Soprano Pipistrelles and Common Pipistrelle bats during their training at Brockhampton Estate neighbouring Bromyard Downs Common.

Recordings during Lucy Fay's bat walk indicate the usage of the area by both Common and Soprano Pipistrelles; and also Myotis species.

The first NBMP Field Survey on the Bromyard Downs recorded 1 Noctule; 29 Common Pipistrelle; 14 Soprano Pipistrelle. In addition to this survey, some Myotis species were also recorded. The second survey later in the month of July did not record a similar diversity of bats but did reveal a greater numbers of Common Pipistrelles at 44.

Dormouse was successfully recorded at the Bioblitz event when a hazelnut was found by one of the children during Joe Allsopp's presentation and walk revealing the classic gnawing technique.

Early morning small mammal checks of the Longworth traps set by volunteers revealed that some of the triggers had been activated. However this year only 2 bank voles were recorded. Other mammals evidenced include live sightings of muntjac deer and squirrel, together with signs of field vole; mole; rabbit; and hedgehog. Badger and fox were also recorded by camera traps.

Time spent by volunteers and skill level

Dormouse Training Day & monthly check 25th April & May 2015	Skill level	Time
Joe Allsopp	Trainer Co ordinator	2
Andy	Unskilled	1
Gwyneth	Unskilled	1
Volunteers 4	Unskilled	4

Dormouse Talk	Skill level	Time
Joe Allsopp	Trainer	0.5
Schoolchildren #16	Unskilled	8

Bat Detector Training. Bat Conservation Trust 29th May 2015	Skill level	Time
Louise Scott	Trainer Co ordinator	1
Rebecca Collins	Trainer	0.5
Kate Stallard	Unskilled	0.5
Paul Symons	Unskilled	0.5
Kris Dunn-Bardo	Unskilled	0.5
John Lane	Unskilled	0.5
David Boddington	Unskilled	0.5
Lauren Smith	Unskilled	0.5
Giles King-Slater	Unskilled	0.5
Andrew Hall	Unskilled	0.5
Philip Lanc	Unskilled	0.5
Nick Hinchcliffe	Moderate	0.5
Joseph Allsopp	Moderate	0.5
Michael Bailey	Moderate	0.5
Michael Bradley	unskilled	0.5
Mitchell Jackson	Moderate	0.5
Nick Benes	Unskilled	0.5
Penny Hurt	Unskilled	0.5

Bioblitz Prelim Walk of Survey Site 26th June 2015	Skill level	Time
Louise Scott	Trainer Co ordinator	2
Kate Stallard	Beginner	0.5
Paul Symons	Beginner	0.5
John Lane	Beginner	0.5
Lauren Smith	Beginner	0.5
Bat Ecology & Walk		
Lucy Fay	Trainer	0.5
Schoolchildren 10+	Unskilled	0.5
Adults 8+	Unskilled	0.5
Dormice Ecology Search for Signs of		
Joseph Allsopp	Trainer	1.5
Schoolchildren 30+	Unskilled	0.5
Mammal Ecology Trapping		
Dave Smith	Trainer	1
Schoolchildren 30+	Unskilled	0.5

Bat Conservation Trust NBMP Field Survey 1 11th July 2015	Skill level	Time
Louise Scott	Trainer Co ordinator	0.5
Kate Stallard	Beginner	0.5
Paul Symons	Beginner	0.5
John Lane	Beginner	0.5
Lauren Smith	Beginner	0.5
Kris Dunn-Bardo	Beginner	0.5

Bat Conservation Trust NBMP Field Survey 1 18th July 2015	Skill level	Time
Louise Scott	Trainer Co ordinator	1
Kate Stallard	Beginner	0.5
Paul Symons	Beginner	0.5
John Lane	Beginner	0.5
Giles King-Slater	Beginner	0.5
Kris Dunn-Bardo	Beginner	0.5
David Boddington	Beginner	0.5

Evaluation

The total involvement of Herefordshire Mammal Group members, and the Bromyard Downs Common volunteers accounts for in excess of 120 individuals including members of the public, who contributed over 78 ½ days to the project.

The 2015 Bioblitz facilitated an amalgamation of environmental disciplines and individuals were able to participate in activities involving bats and small mammals including dormice.

All who participated showed encouraging signs of increased interest in knowing how to search for signs of mammals on the Bromyard Downs. Numerous school children have been enthused and diligently searched for signs of nibbled hazelnuts. They also learnt to set small mammal traps. 16 predominantly unskilled people underwent initial bat detector training launching them into beginners who could take on their own surveys with The Bat Conservation Trust. 7 volunteers went on to assist with the National Bat Monitoring Programme on The Bromyard Downs, honing their identification skills further. Feedback from the volunteers has been nothing but positive and they are looking forward to next year.

The project so far has provided a great opportunity for Herefordshire Mammal Group and other naturalists to support the local community; educate youngsters and adults alike; and to liaise with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust in their partnership with the Bromyard Downs Common Association.