

## FRIENDS OF HALSEY FIELD: WILDLIFE DIARY 2017

---



25 February 2017

### Event

Mice are Nice: biological surveying of small mammals

### Organisers

Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trusts

### Co-ordinating the event

Simon Braidman (*Wildlife Officer & Warden for: Stanmore Common*) from the Harrow Nature Conservation Forum.

Huma Pearce (*Project Officer & Coordinator for: Vole Patrol Survey*) London Wildlife Trusts.

**25 February 2017 | 7:00am - 1:00pm / 1:50pm - 2:30pm**

### Venue location

Stanmore Common,  
Stanmore,  
Middlesex,  
HA7 3HQ

### Grid reference

TQ 157 939

---

### Mini Mammals thriving at Stanmore Common

*Article by Stephen Lings*

I joined Chris Ridley for an early start (6:00am) to attend a biological surveying training day for small mammals conducted by Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust.

The training day provided the opportunity to see and take part in mammal trapping, marking, measuring and releasing. On the day we were able to observe and take part in the capture and processing of live mice, voles and shrews under careful supervision of Huma who is in charge of a nine week small mammal survey at nine sites in London including Pear Wood next to Stanmore Common, whose key target species are Yellow-necked Mouse (*Apodemus flavicollis*) and Common Shrew (*Sorex araneus*). Small mammal surveys provide an opportunity to monitor the numbers of small mammals such as voles, mice and shrews, which can be impossible to see without using specialist equipment.

Huma gave those attending some fascinating insights into the behaviour of voles, mice and shrews and explained best practice for setting of traps, handling and recording so that animals are not harmed or unduly stressed.

Huma and her team had set 30+ Bioecoss Tube Traps and 8 Longworth Traps at 5 different locations across the common the previous evening with the aim of attracting small mammals. Luckily for us a number had triggered during the night for us to examine on the day.

Once we had checked and surveyed the occupants of the traps, the traps were re-baited with a grain and seed peanut butter ball, apple and casters (fly pupae) and filled with hay, to provide bedding for any visitors who may venture into the traps once there were re-set and positioned back in the undergrowth.

Once a mouse has ventured in to the trap, it will touch a trigger mechanism, closing a door at the trap entrance, trapping the mammal overnight until the revisit to the site to collect the traps in the next morning. Enough food to last a small mammal over 24 hours was used on this occasion as small mammals will be feeding more to gain fat to see them through the colder months.

The survey was attended by volunteers and members of the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust and the London Wildlife Trust on a cloudy and cold morning but the weather failed to dampen spirits. Of the 30+ traps left out for the night, 8 wood mice (*Apodemus sylvaticus*), 1 pygmy shrew (*Sorex minutes*), 3 field vole or Short-tailed Vole (*Microtus agrestis*) and 4 bank vole (*Clethrionomys glareolus*) were recorded.

Participants were given an opportunity to sex the mammals, measure and mark. Everybody was able to see the subtle differences between species by gently scruffing each one and placing them first into a cotton bag for the scientific recording and then into a clear plastic bag so that they could be weighed and photographed before releasing them back to the site their came from. The common provides an ideal habitat for voles, wood mice and shrews as discovered.

A healthy population of these small mammals indicates a healthy habitat and will ensure that there is plenty of food for the owls, kestrels, stoats and foxes living around the common. Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust hopes to revisit the common next spring to see how the small mammal population has fared over the winter.

It is hoped that we will undertake a small mammal survey in the future at Halsey Field so that the whole biological record of its inhabitants can be recorded for future site management.

## **Field Surveying Techniques**

---

Surveying for mammals on Halsey Field can be conducted in various ways using numerous disciplines. At present I myself have been using field Observations, tracks and signs

### **Field Observations, tracks and signs**

This is the simplest form of surveying for mammals using field observations such as sightings, faeces and tracks. This method can be conducted by anyone with a good working knowledge of mammal identification; however, the identification of faeces and tracks requires excellent knowledge of behaviour and diet of that particular mammal. Field and Bank vole surveying is a prime example of how field observations can be used to their full extent, as surveys can estimate population sizes based on feeding remains, latrines and runs in an area.



*Field Vole Latrine*



*Field Vole Tunnel*

### **Live (humane) Trapping**

Many mammals cannot be monitored purely by field observations so other techniques must be employed. For smaller mammals such as mice and voles when surveying we can use live trapping methods to directly ascertain the gender, weight and breeding condition of each individual.

This method allows us to help to create a comprehensive record of the demography of the small mammal population in the area. There are a variety of traps that can be used for small mammal trapping with the most popular being Longworth and BioEcoSS Tube Traps due to their success rate, when surveying in this way it is also possible to conduct "mark and recapture" studies.



*Longworth small mammal trap*



*BioEcoSS Tube (Main Trap used at the event)*

### **Line Transects**

The use of line transects is also an important survey method as they can be employed alongside other techniques. Line transects require that a surveyor follows a predetermined line which should cross the habitat to be surveyed. Many trapping studies use this method to ensure that the sampling method is seen to be unbiased. It is best used in situations where a population is considered to be sparse in a large area, transect would offer the best chance of finding field signs.

## Record of the: Mice are Nice - biological surveying of small mammals

---



Pygmy Shrew



Bank Vole



Wood Mouse



Scruffing of small rodents is the best way to hold them; picking up a wood mouse by its tail can cause the skin to shear away painfully and permanently both unpleasant for the mouse and you left holding a bloody mess of skin.

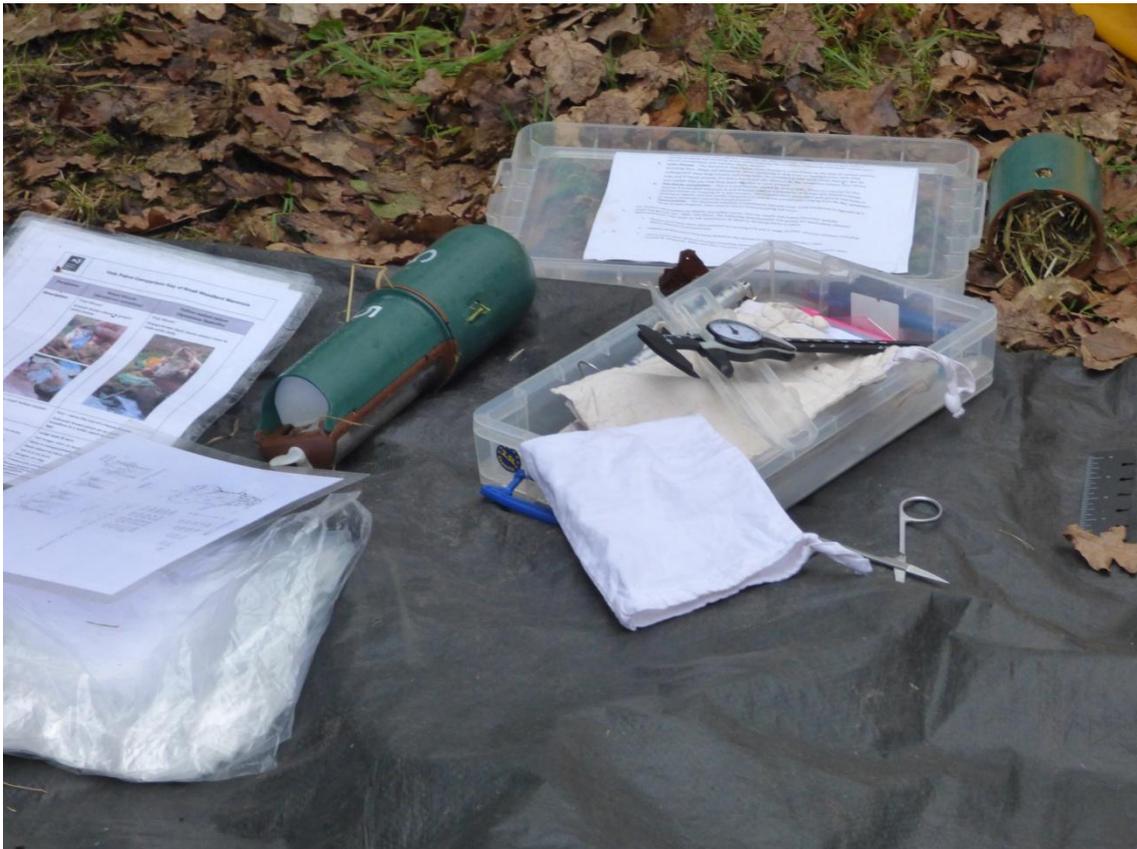
We were taught to prepare and set small-mammal traps, the correct way to check them and the proper way to handle and record the wild rodents we caught. We were also shown how to clean the traps after use and how to rebait it and re-set it for the evenings next trapping session.



Trap when in location (not triggered)



Three Traps ready for inspection



Getting ready to open a trap and getting all the necessary equipment at hand



Trap placed in plastic bag to prevent escape



opening up the trap to see what's inside



Chris Ridley having a go to inspect a trap



gently coaxing the mouse to the corner



Once in a corner Chris then scruffs the mouse to transfer to a smaller bag for weighing



Weighing the mouse



everyone having a look



Bank Vole



Wood Mouse



Getting the Wood Mouse into a corner to make scruffing easy for transfer to cloth bag



Scruffing the Wood Mouse



transferred into a cloth bag for closer inspection



Inspecting the Wood Mouse



taking measurements and sexing the mouse



Taking more measurements; length of mouse foot etc



Measuring the Wood Mouse Tail length



marking the Wood Mouse incase of re-capture



This is the one that got away to be inspected another day.



And successful we were, just goes to show even with only 30 traps it is definitely worth going out we found field vole, bank vole and wood mouse and got plenty of practice with the traps.

WEATHER ON THE DAY OF TRAPPING			
Date	25 <sup>th</sup>	February	2017
Sunrise	06:54am	Sunset	
Weather	Overcast	Overcast	Overcast/Light Drizzle
Time	07:00am	09:00am	1:00pm
	Min Temp	Max Temp	Max Temp
Temp	5°C	9°C	9°C
Feels Like	1°C	5°C	5°C
	Rain	0.0%	0.1%
	Wind	14mph	18mph
	Direction	SW	SW
	Gust	25mph	23mph
	Cloud	100%	100%
	Pressure	1015mb	1014mb
1012mb			
SMALL MAMMALS TRAPPED ON THE DAY			
Location		Stanmore Common, HA7 3HQ	Grid reference TQ 157 939
Species:	Family:	Common Name	Scientific name:
Rodentia	Muridae	Wood Mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>
<b>Appearance:</b> Brown fur, with white-grey under-parts, large black eyes, long tail and large ears.		<i>Other names</i>	
		long-tailed field mouse, field mouse, common field mouse, European wood mouse	
Rodentia	Cricetidae	Bank Vole	<i>Clethrionomys glareolus</i>
<b>Appearance:</b> Reddish-brown with white under-parts. Slightly longer faces than the field voles and larger eyes and ears, and longer tails.		Smallest UK vole	
		Field Vole	<i>Microtus agrestis</i>
<b>Appearance:</b> Small stocky body and a blunt, rounded muzzle. Sandy coloured brown coat plus a shorter and hairy tail.		<i>Other names</i>	
		Short-tailed Vole	
Insectivora	Soricidae	Pygmy Shrew	<i>Sorex minutus</i>
<b>Appearance:</b> The fur colour is brown on top and greyish-white below. The fur grows thicker autumn/winter		smallest mammals found in the UK	

End.