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Harvest mouse (*Micromys minutus*) Species Action Plan 2009-2013

Plan Lead Organisation	Northumbria Mammal Group
Plan Coordinator	Ian Bond
Action Group	Wetland and Coastal
Associated Plans	Reedbeds, arable field margins. unimproved grassland
Latest version	Published March 2009

Description

The harvest mouse is Britain's smallest rodent, weighing from 4 to 8g. It is adapted for climbing through vegetation with a prehensile tail, light skeleton, flexible legs and feet which have a large outer toe on its hind foot. Although traditionally associated with cereal fields, the harvest mouse lives in a variety of habitats that have tall grass, reed or sedge. These include marshes, reedbeds, rough grassland, hedgerows, bramble patches and roadside verges. Their diet consists mainly of seeds and berries with some insects, fungi, roots and moss. Harvest mice construct breeding nests, woven from grass, in grass stems between 10cm and 1m above the ground. As the vegetation dies back in autumn they usually move into tunnels underground.

The harvest mouse has a southern and eastern distribution in Britain and is absent from Ireland. They are believed to be rapidly declining throughout Britain and remain vulnerable to loss of habitat and habitat fragmentation due to intensification of agriculture and loss of rough grassland.

The population dynamics of the harvest mouse are poorly understood. Individuals only live for a few months, although populations can increase rapidly in suitable conditions, but a high overwinter mortality rate combined with likely limited dispersal ability can result in local extinctions and failure to recolonise.

Current factors causing loss and decline

- ◆ Intensive farming methods including loss of hedgerows and lack of unmanaged field margins.
- ◆ Habitat fragmentation and isolation.
- ◆ Lack of ecological information, knowledge of distribution and under-recording resulting in populations receiving inadequate conservation.

Conservation Status

UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species (2007)

The Species in the Tees Valley

North east England is on the northern fringe of the range of the species. No systematic distribution surveys either by trapping or locating nests have been carried out in north east England. In the Tees Valley the Northumbria Mammal Society maintains records of sightings. There have been several recent records (post year 2000) in the Tees Valley. South of the River Tees there are records from the Great Ayton area, Coatham Marsh, Pinchinthorpe & Boulby. They may be much more widespread in East Cleveland and this area would benefit from surveys. North of the Tees in the Tees Valley there are records from the 1980s from Billingham Beck and Castle Eden Walkway, but there have been no recent records from these sites despite them being well-observed Country Parks. They have been recorded post year 2000 at Long Newton, Bowesfield Nature Reserve and Dorman's Pool.

Current Activity in the Tees Valley

A captive breeding programme and release scheme in Stockton was carried out between 2001 and 2005 by Stockton Borough Council. Releases occurred on four sites; Cowpen Woodland Park, Portrack Marsh, Wynyard Woodland Park and Brinefield No 4 on the Tees Estuary. These are known to have been successful, at least in terms of the occasional mouse being found in subsequent years, on three sites. It is unclear whether the release on the fourth site, Portrack Marsh, has been successful. In 2008 the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust erected a series of harvest mouse nesting boxes at Portrack Marsh to survey for their presence.

Further Information

Mammal Society www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal/ downloadable species fact sheet

Harris S. (1979) History, distribution, status and habitat requirements of the Harvest Mouse, *Micromys minutus* in Britain. *Mammal Review* 9:159-171

Perrow M & Jowitt A (1995) What Future the Harvest Mouse? *British Wildlife* Vol 6; No 6, pp356-365

Vision Statement

To obtain a greater knowledge of the distribution of the harvest mouse and its habitat preferences in the Tees Valley and to use this knowledge as a basis for increasing its range in the Tees Valley by targeting habitat management to enhance and extend suitable habitats at known locations.

Targets

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| HM.T1 | Increased information and knowledge about the distribution of the harvest mouse in the Tees Valley. |
| Goal: | Data from systematic surveys. |
| HM.T2 | Increase the population size in Tees Valley by ensuring known sites and suitable colonisation sites are suitably managed. |
| Goal: | 10 sites suitably managed for Harvest Mouse. |

Actions

Code	Action	Organisational lead	Action contact	Partners	End date
HM.A1	Obtain grant funding for a two year harvest mouse project to carry out surveys, restore suitable habitat and raise awareness.	TVBP	Sue Antrobus	Northumbria Mammal Group	2009
HM.A2	Co-ordinate a systematic programme of survey and monitoring.	TVWT (Harvest Mouse Project)	Sue Antrobus	Northumbria Mammal Group	2012
HM.A3	Address under recording by providing a programme of training for volunteers and countryside staff.	Northumbria Mammal Group (Harvest Mouse Project)	Ian Bond/Don Griss	TVWT	ongoing
HM.A4	Write management briefs for harvest mice on sites with current or historical records to establish suitable management regimes.	TVWT (Harvest Mouse Project)	Sue Antrobus	Northumbria Mammal Group	2012
HM.A5	Develop suitable habitat links around current sites to allow species to extend range	TVWT (Harvest Mouse Project)	Sue Antrobus	Northumbria Mammal Group	2012
HM.A6	Carry out analysis of barn owl pellets for harvest mice remains obtained via TBC owl ringers.	TVWT (Wildpaces project)	Kenny Crooks	TBC, Northumbria Mammal Group	Ongoing