

Mammal Watching in Great Britain, 2017

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Introduction

I've added my foreign mammal watching trips to the mammal watching website over the years but none from my own country of Great Britain (GB). So I thought I'd make amends and do a report on my 2017 sightings in GB, though strictly speaking sightings were in England with one trip to Scotland. Although I keep a mammal year list I wasn't going for a "big year" or anything like that; in fact a lot of what I did in 2017 I do most years. For example, looking for all British deer species, counting Bats or going out Fox, Otter and Badger watching. So this is a day by day, month by month report, more of a diary than a trip report.

Many locations mentioned are in the area where I live Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, England. I'm also a keen birder so I do a lot of local patch birding as well as mammal watching. I also record reptiles, amphibians, butterflies and dragonflies. However, I've kept the non-mammals to a minimum in this write-up!

I haven't mentioned the following mammals on every occasion I saw them as they are easy to see anywhere (and basically everywhere) in Britain - European Rabbit, Grey Squirrel, Brown Rat. However, with regard to Rabbits in some areas they have become scarce due to ongoing outbreaks of myxomatosis and now Rabbit haemorrhagic disease. I haven't recorded every Wood Mouse, Grey Squirrel, Badger or Red Fox sighting in my garden - which is most days.

All sites/locations mentioned in this report can be found easily enough by just putting the site name in your search engine. However these web addresses may also help:

For Minsmere RSPB reserve: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/minsmere>

For the Norfolk locations look on the sites tab at:

<http://www.norfolkbirds.com/sites.aspx?s=26>

All reports on foreign mammal watching trips I have done this year and mentioned in this report are on www.mammalwatching.com/

My Wildlife Garden

I have a small garden it's only 15 x 7.5 metres. Despite that I tend it as a wildlife garden with small trees, wild flowers, bushes, grasses, log piles, compost heaps and a pond. The pond has breeding Common Frogs and Smooth Newts; Common Toads are unfortunately just occasional visitors now but have bred in the past. I also have breeding Slow Worms. I've been feeding Red Foxes in my garden for at least 30 years (so through many Fox generations). I have never tried to tame them or feed them by hand or even be in the garden at the same time as their visits - they are kept wild and so hopefully wary of humans. Furthermore I don't overfeed them only putting out enough to make it worth their while visiting but not enough for them to become dependent on it. In fact as up to 4 Foxes can visit it is often the case of first come first served. The Foxes usually turn up at night but can and do turn up any time of day - although food is only put out in the evening. For the last two years two and occasionally three, Badgers have been visiting regularly and so I now feed them as well. They can visit late in the evening but more usually it is in the early hours of the morning. I catch them on

my trail cam which I put out 3 or 4 times a week. I put out peanuts for the Badgers and also for the Wood Mice that also frequent the garden. Grey Squirrels are regular visitors and are usually around the bird feeders. On summer evenings a few Common Pipistrelles hunt over the garden. All in all not a bad garden for wildlife bearing in mind I live in a very crowded corner of suburban South East Essex.



One of the Wood Mice living in my garden.

John Wright

A Year of Sightings

January

Monday 2nd January. Wat Tyler Country Park, Pitsea. Not a lot about, just a few **Rabbits**. In the afternoon went to Little Havens

Wood, Daws Heath, Essex Wildlife Trust reserve, and saw a few **Grey Squirrels** and at dusk a **Red Fox**.

Tuesday 3rd January. Went to a central Essex site with two friends who are licensed Bat surveyors to check a winter bat roost. We had a pretty good count: 16 **Natterer's**; 17 **Daubenton's**; 20 **Brown-long Eared**; three **Barbastelle**. In the surrounding woodland we saw 6 **Fallow Deer**, a **Brown Hare** and a **Grey Squirrel**.

Wednesday 4th January. River Thames estuary. Checked out the low tide sandbanks off Westcliff seafront (about 1k west of Southend-on-Sea Pier). There were 10 **Harbour (Common) Seals** hauled out. This is a reliable haul out site for Harbour Seals at low tide, particularly in the non-breeding season. But they are a bit distant so you need binoculars at the very least. Occasionally they are joined by a few Grey Seals. Harbour Seals easily outnumber Grey Seals in the Thames estuary.

Friday 13th - Friday 20th January, Spain, Sierra De Andujar.

February

Thursday 2nd February. Thames estuary, Westcliff seafront sandbanks at low tide, 10 **Harbour Seals** hauled out.

Tuesday 14th February. Two Tree Island, Leigh-on-Sea, the Essex Wildlife Trust manage this council owned island for wildlife. A late afternoon till dusk visit produced two **Water Voles**. It's always worth a look for Water Voles from the hide that overlooks a small reed fringed pond. Take the centre track on eastern side of island for about 300 metres when you will see a hide that overlooks the pond on your right.

Saturday 18th February - Saturday 4th March, India, Ladakh.

March

Monday 6th March. My garden. One **Badger** caught on trail cam in the early hours of the morning.

Monday 13th March - Friday 17th March, Estonia.

Tuesday 21st March. Decided to go for a Humpback Whale that had been showing well just off the coast of south Devon at Slapton Ley over the last couple of weeks. Given that I'd been out of the country this was my first realistic chance to try for it. Went with a friend - Paul Baker. I drove and just as I pulled away from my house in the early hours two **Badgers** crossed the road in front of me and shortly after a **Fox** did the same. We arrived at Slapton Ley around 09:00 to have a scan although knowing that the whale usually didn't appear until late afternoon. We hung around for a couple of hours seeing a fair few **Harbour Porpoises** and a **Grey Seal** before going off to look at some nearby Cirl Buntings.

Returning to Slapton around 14:00 the **Porpoises** showed well and we estimated we saw at least 20. What was also pleasing to see was a pod of about 10 **Common Dolphins**, unfortunately they didn't loiter but carried on and were soon lost to view. Then, at 16:30, great excitement as the **Humpback Whale** appeared at the eastern end of the bay and gave super views as it slowly moved west, right past us and close inshore. We watched it on and off for an hour before our final sighting of a blow way down the western end of the bay.

We stayed overnight in Plymouth. Paul had some work to do and was therefore staying in Plymouth for a couple more days before getting the train back home with some work colleagues.

Wednesday 22nd March. I drove to Portland Bill in Dorset where I was staying overnight at Portland Bird Observatory and Field Centre.

I went to Radipole Lake, in nearby Weymouth, which is an RSPB reserve and staked out the north end of the lake in the hope of seeing a European Otter. I had seen one here last year but despite being there from 17:30 until dark the only mammal I saw was a **Brown Rat**.

Thursday 23rd March. I drove to the nearby town of Blandford Forum (about 45 minutes drive from Portland) arriving just after 06:00. I walked slowly up and down the bank of the River Stour looking for Otters which I'd seen here before over the years. Apart from some **Grey Squirrels** and **Rabbits** not much was happening and with the river in full spate I wasn't feeling confident. Nevertheless, at 08:00 it all kicked off as three **Otters** chased each other along the bank and across adjacent grassland at great speed. The final sighting was of a single **Otter** running across the grass some way from the river but at least heading back towards it! Amazing really as the adjacent area to the river is parkland with a river side path heavily used by dog walkers. I then returned to Portland for breakfast. Late morning I departed Portland and made my way to Arne RSPB reserve on the Purbeck peninsula, still in Dorset. My target here was Sika Deer which are very easy to see - I don't think I've ever failed to see them here. I've been watching Sika Deer here since the mid 1980's although the first ones I ever saw were in the New Forest, Hampshire, near Brockenhurst in 1981. Anyway today at Arne I saw 10 **Sika Deer** including a white stag. I didn't stay long as I wanted to push on to the New Forest in the adjacent county of Hampshire. I saw at least 40 **Fallow Deer** around the winter feeding deer watching platforms at Boulderwood plantation. I went looking for Red Deer around the Marksway enclosure area, where I have seen them before, but didn't find any. However, I did see three **Roe Deer** and a few **Fallow Deer** before driving home.

Saturday 25th March. My garden. One **Badger** caught on trail cam in early hours of morning. Stayed local today and visited Canvey Island and walked around West Canvey Marsh RSPB reserve. I found three **Field Voles** under reptile refuge mats and also did ok for reptiles: Adder five; Grass Snake one; Common Lizard four; Slow Worm five. Not far from my house I stopped to check out a piece of corrugated tin I placed on a scrubby hillside and was pleased to find a black Adder which was presumably the same individual I found here last year.



Black Adder

phone photo John Wright

April

Sunday 2nd April. Mersea Island, North East Essex. A quick trip here with my wife Jane to look for some introduced **Red Squirrels**. We had great views of two possibly three. They were in a small wood at

the north end of Shop Lane, East Mersea. There are no Grey Squirrels on Mersea Island which is why the Reds have been introduced and appear to be doing very well despite it not being a particularly wooded island. They have been taken to heart by the locals and most gardens have squirrel feeders. However, historically Red Squirrels were never recorded on the island even when they were still widespread in Essex. There are no Red Squirrels anywhere else in Essex!

Monday 3rd April. Went with a friend, Richard Howard, to the River Little Ouse at Santon Downham, in the 'Brecks' on the Suffolk/Norfolk border just east of Brandon, near Thetford. I knew Otters were being seen there recently so thought it was well worth a look plus some decent birding in the area was an attraction. Soon after our arrival at 06:45 we were onto three **Otters** just west of the road bridge, an adult female with a well grown cub (so born 2016) hunting along the river where they were soon joined by an adult male but he soon swam off in one direction whilst the female and cub carried on hunting in the opposite direction. We watched the female and cub on and off for 20 minutes before they swam east under the road bridge and away. We spent most of the day birding but I did see a **Muntjac** as we drove along the A11 road en route to Cavenham. Best birds seen were Lesser-spotted Woodpecker, Firecrest, Marsh Tit, Woodlark, Crossbill, Hawfinch, Brambling, Siskin, Redpoll.

Friday 7th April. Hadleigh Downs Country Park, located between Leigh-on-Sea and Benfleet. A (Least) **Weasel** ran across a track in front of me when I was out on my bike. Also present in the Country Park are Foxes, Badgers and Muntjac. There are also Marsh Frogs that were introduced in the 1980's.

Mon 10th April. Woodwalton Fen, Cambridgeshire. This is a location I've been coming to since the 1980's for Chinese Water Deer with great success. I would say it's the most reliable site if you want to see them and they usually show well. I arrived at first light and walked quietly through the reserve and soon spotted a couple of **Chinese Water Deer** in an area of cut reeds. Carrying on through the reserve I carefully peered over the western boundary of the reserve to look across the adjacent farmland, mainly wet grassland grazed by cattle, and counted six **Chinese Water Deer** feeding there. If you are struggling to see the deer on the reserve this area to the west of the reserve viewed from the boundary bund is definitely worth a look as you can almost be guaranteed a sighting here. Never as close as those seen actually on the reserve but nevertheless well worth it. If possible go in winter or early spring and get there early although dusk can, of course, be good. In other words do what you do when out looking for any deer species - go very early or just before dusk for the best results. I also visited a bird hide on the reserve and saw at least four more **Chinese Water Deer**, two from the hide and two on my way to it. I stayed on the reserve about 4 hours and counted 12 Chinese Water Deer although last year I saw over 20 in the same time period. I also saw a single **Brown Hare** and a **Grey Squirrel**. Otters are present but elusive and I've never seen one here. I usually see Muntjac but not this time - they tend to frequent the more wooded, dryer southern end of the reserve.

Tuesday 11th April. Fleet Head, Great Wakering, S.E. Essex. Watched a **Water Vole** for about 10 minutes in a small fishing lake.

Tuesday 18th April. Canvey Island, West Canvey Marsh RSPB reserve. Not a lot about but a good view of a **Water Vole** was worth the walk.

Wednesday 19th April. Minsmere RSPB reserve, Suffolk. Got to the Island Mere Hide at 06:15 to look for Otters. The Island Mere Hide has been a reliable place in recent years for viewing Otters and I've watched them here over the last few years. Although they can be seen any time of day I've found early morning is best. Always check out the very useful Otter log book in the hide as people record all sightings, so please don't forget to add any of your own sightings. Otters are seen in other areas of the reserve but the Island Mere Hide is at the moment the most reliable. Although they can be seen any time of year it's best to visit in early winter after the reeds in front of the hide have been cut through to early spring when reed growth doesn't hamper viewing in front of the hide. Today I only got a brief sighting of an **Otter** at 07:30 and again at 07:35. But Bitterns showed well and a rather distant reeling Savi's Warbler was good value. I left for home around mid-day.

May

Friday 12th May. Minsmere RSPB reserve, Suffolk. Looking for Water Shrews I staked out the small pond behind the visitors centre just below the Sand Martin breeding colony sand bank. I slowly walked along, or stood still, on the boardwalk that crosses over the pond staring intently through the reeds and at the pond margins. Finally I had good views of a **Water Shrew** for 5 minutes - but it took me 3.5 hours! However, I did observe at least two **Water Voles** much more frequently than the shrew during my vigil.

Monday 15th May. Wallasea Island RSPB reserve, Essex, 05:30 - 08:00. I was actually doing a breeding bird survey but counted 12 **Brown Hares**. Wallasea Island is easily one of the best and easiest places to see Brown Hare locally to where I live. In the late afternoon

I went to Fleet Head, Great Wakering, but only saw one **Brown Hare** and a few **Rabbits**.

Tuesday 16th May. Went with a friend Phil Telfer to The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, RSPB HQ. We got there early and staked out Jack's pond that Mark Hows told me about, he has had a good rate of success seeing Water Shrews in the pond, although most of the ponds on the reserve hold Water Shrews. Unfortunately we didn't see any but did see a **Stoat** and heard two **Muntjac** barking but they remained out of sight. We left for home late morning.

Monday 22nd May. Fleet Head, Great Wakering. A wander around for just over an hour produced two **Brown Hares**, a **Red Fox** and plenty of **Rabbits**.

Tues 23rd May. Minsmere RSPB reserve, Suffolk. There was a **Fox** in my garden just as I left home around 03:30 and then I saw another two **Foxes** a few minutes later as I drove down the road. In Suffolk as I drove along the approach road to the reserve I spooked two **Muntjac** that were feeding on the grass verge. I arrived at the Island Mere hide at 05:40. At 07:55 a female **Otter** with two **cubs** swam out from the reeds and across the mere. They were only on view for five minutes before disappearing into the reeds on the far side of the mere. I waited another 15 minutes before leaving the hide and walked towards the visitor centre. On my way I came across two **Muntjac** together in the woods - a buck and a doe that were unconcerned about my presence and consequently showed well. I then staked out the pond behind the visitors centre for 1.5 hours but didn't see any Water Shrews this time but did see two **Water Voles**. The only other mammals I saw in the reserve were **Rabbits** and **Grey Squirrels**. I walked a footpath on the adjacent Westleton Heath and found 45 **Red Deer** lying in the shade under some trees. The heath,

south of the Dunwich road, is a good area to look for Red Deer rutting in the autumn although access to the heath is restricted at that time to prevent disturbance to the deer. Nevertheless there are places to view from depending on where the rut is taking place - I've always managed it ok. The RSPB does run a Red Deer rut watch from the back of a land rover that takes you onto the heath. But there are no guarantees you will see any action and it isn't cheap. I left the area and headed for home early afternoon.

In the evening I visited a local Badger sett but only one **Badger** appeared at around 21:00. I also saw six **Foxes** and six **Common Pipistrelles** - I had my bat detector with me.

Wednesday 31st May. West Canvey Marsh RSPB reserve. I found a juvenile Bank Vole on a path so I moved it to some adjacent long grass. Also following an influx of Red-veined Darters into East Anglia I was very pleased to find three at this site today.



Juvenile Bank Vole

phone photos John Wright



Juvenile Bank Vole

In the evening I met up with the Essex Bat Group at the Essex Wildlife Trust visitors centre at Hanningfield Reservoir to help count the Soprano Pipistrelles as they emerged at dusk from their maternity roost. They emerge from various holes out of the roof space but mainly from a huge bat box. We counted 864 **Soprano Pipistrelles**.

June

Thursday 1st June. My garden. 3 **Common Pipistrelles** flitting about early evening.

Saturday 3rd June. Wallasea RSPB reserve. Afternoon visit. I saw 8 **Brown Hares** and four **Fox cubs** playing together. Plus two female Adders and eight Painted Lady Butterflies.



Part of a well used local Badger sett, June 2017, note the dropped bedding on the sand spoil. Phone photo John Wright.

Tuesday 13th June. Somerset for four days with my wife Jane. Staying in Glastonbury and visiting the Avalon marshes.

Shapwick Heath National Nature Reserve (NNR). A **Weasel** ran across the road in front of us just before we drove into the car park. Sat in Noah hide at Noah Lake from 06:30 to 09:30 in the hope of an Otter but no luck. But it was nice to see Glossy Ibis, Bitterns, Great White

and Cattle Egrets. We then crossed the road to Ham Wall RSPB reserve. As we walked along a path we had great views of an **American Mink** for 10 minutes as it went about its business hunting along a small reed fringed channel. In the UK American Mink aren't every body's favourite animal and of course they shouldn't be here as they do have a rather detrimental impact on native wildlife particularly on the Water Vole. I believe Mink are referred to as an invasive alien. Personally I blame the disgusting fur trade as they set up mink fur farms in Britain back in the 1930's and 40's. American Mink were first recorded breeding wild in Britain in the 1950's in Devon and I saw my first one in Somerset whilst on holiday with my parents in 1968! Anyway in my opinion they are, like all other mustelids, a fabulous mammal to look at and to watch. In the early evening we drove the short distance to Westhay Moor and sat in a hide hoping for Otters but had no luck again. Up to four Hobbies hawking dragonflies were entertaining however.

Wednesday 14th June. Much the same as yesterday - we sat in hides early morning and at dusk but still no Otters. But did see a **Roe Deer** and a **Fox** at Ham Wall reserve and a **Weasel** near Glastonbury.

Thursday 15th June. Went to Cheddar Gorge for Horseshoe Bats. The cliffs and land surrounding the gorge is grazed by feral Goats and Soay Sheep both of which we found quite easily. In the evening when all the tourist had gone home we waited right outside the entrance to Gough's Cave - which is the main show cave for visitors. Go up the stairs by the cafe, the stairs take you onto a level above the entrance gates to the cave. The bats emerge through a gap at the top of the cave entrance. At dusk **Lesser Horseshoe Bats** were flitting around the entrance testing the light levels and were soon followed by **Greater Horseshoe Bats**. The size difference of the two species being very apparent, as well as the different sounds they emit picked up on

my bat detector. Super close views of both species before they spread out from the cave entrance and it got too dark to see.

Friday 16th June. Again did Ham Wall and Shapwick Heath reserves but apart from a few **Rabbits** we didn't see any mammals. But of an amphibian interest I asked an RSPB warden about the Marsh Frogs in the ponds by the car park at Ham Wall. They have been DNA'd and it turns out they are Iberian Water Frogs.

In the afternoon we visited Collard Hill, a National Trust reserve just south of Glastonbury. Here we found at least six Large Blue Butterflies - which wasn't bad as it was rather cloudy and windy. From there we headed for Otterton in south Devon to look for European Beavers along the River Otter. News started leaking out in 2014 that Beavers were being seen on the river following what was obviously an illegal release. Fortunately it became a monitored legal re-introduction project in 2015. We arrived at Otterton just after 19:00 and walked along the track adjacent to the River Otter. It wasn't long before we were getting fabulous views of a **Beaver** - a pink ear tagged female. I believe this is the same female I watched here with a kit last year. We watched her on and off for about 40 minutes before returning to our car for the 4 hour drive home.

Directions for the Beavers: Park in Otterton village, walk west over the River Otter road bridge, immediately go through the gate on your right and walk north along the west side of the river. Although potentially the Beavers can be seen anywhere along the river the best area is from the weir/fish ladder onwards for about 800 metres. A good place to view from is the wooden foot bridge up river from the weir. Early mornings and evenings are best. Information as of November 2017 is that there are now six families totalling 27 Beavers

on the River Otter and tributaries. Otters are sometimes seen along the river as well.



Above sign put up along the river. For more information on the River Otter Beavers see: <http://www.devonwildlifetrust.org/river-Otter-beavers>

Wednesday 21st June. Minsmere RSPB reserve, Suffolk. Went there in the afternoon to look for Norfolk Hawker Dragonflies - which I saw easily enough. I spent a bit of time at the 'Water Shrew pond' behind

the visitors centre and had brief views of a **Water Shrew**, good views of a **Water Vole** and heard a **Muntjac** barking. At dusk I went to Westleton Heath and watched Nightjars.

Thursday 22nd and Sunday 25th June. Two **Common Pipistrelles** hunting over my garden on both evenings.

Tuesday 27th June. Scotland with my friend Paul Baker. Our main targets were Red-necked Wallaby, European Beaver and Pine Marten. For the Beaver and Pine Marten we had arranged to meet up with Bob Smith who is the person to contact for both species around Blairgowrie if, that is, you don't want to do your own thing independently. We flew from London Stansted (actually in north Essex not London!) to Glasgow where we picked up our hire car. The weather was not good being cloudy and wet as we made our way to the Trussocks National Park area north west of Glasgow. Our first stop was Loch Feorlin to have a look at a Pied-billed Grebe (a North American species) which had bred with a (European) Little Grebe. It was good to see a pair of Hen Harriers there as well. I noted a **Grey Seal** as we drove passed Loch Fyne, a sea loch. We stayed overnight in the Queen of the Loch Hotel, Balloch, Loch Lomond.

Wednesday 28th June. A cloudy and breezy morning but dry. Apart from a few **Rabbits** there wasn't much to see on a pre-breakfast walk. We drove to Luss, Loch Lomond, where we had pre-booked a two-man kayak to paddle out to Inchconnachan Island where the Wallabies are. The Wallabies had recently been heavily culled and there was some talk that they had all been killed off. Anyway we paddled off at 10:00 and arrived at the island about 45 minutes later. We started walking the island, following the shore line and also taking narrow paths into the centre. We came across two **Grey Squirrels**, two **Fallow Deer** and good numbers of Common Redstarts

and an Osprey. I then spotted a **Red-necked Wallaby** looking at me not too far away and half hidden in the thick vegetation. It eventually hopped off down a track where it was joined by a second Wallaby, both giving decent views. Happy with what we had seen and aware that we were moving on that afternoon we decided to leave the island and paddle back to Luss arriving back at 14:45.

Note: although the midges were a bit of a nuisance they weren't too bad. What was more of a hindrance to viewing and walking was the thick, tall vegetation, even the bracken was head height in places. So if you are going to look for the Wallabies don't go in the height of summer if you can help it! In fact Paul and myself are doing a short trip to Scotland again in March 2018 and will probably visit Inchconnachan Island again for the Wallabies. We won't be going by kayak either despite it being a bit of an adventure we don't fancy trying it in March and so will look to hire a motor boat of some sort.

We then drove to Perth seeing two **Brown Hares** and a **Roe Deer** on the way. We also saw at least seven Red Kites in the vicinity of Lerrocks Farm, Argaty, where a feeding station and visitor hide has been set up.

We arrived at the A9 Travelodge in the north west corner of Perth, dumped our bags and headed off more or less straight away to Blairgowrie about 20k north. We arrived in time for our pre-arranged 18:00 meet up with Bob Smith. After a quick introduction and hellos we jumped into Bob's car and drove the few miles to the River Ericht where we were to look for Beavers. At 18:15 we were making ourselves comfortable on the river bank and waited as Bob, talking quietly, gave us the lowdown on the history and the hoped for bright future of the Tayside Beavers. By the end of the evening, we packed up at 22:15, we had had great views of two **European Beavers** - an

adult female and her kit. Also while sitting on the river bank we saw Osprey, Dipper and Kingfisher. There was also a buck and a doe **Roe Deer** together in a field adjacent to the river. Bob was surprised that we didn't see the male Beaver which often swims past the bank where we were sitting and was also surprised we didn't see an Otter during our river stint. Bob took us back to where our car was and we said our thanks and goodbyes before driving off back to the Travelodge - we saw a single **Roe Deer** on the way back.



Female Beaver with three kits, but only two showing in photo, on the River Ericht. Bob Smith

Thursday 29th June. Rain, rain and more rain and very strong winds. We spent most of the day looking out from the shelter of the car or from a hide the weather was so bad. Our first stop was the Loch of the Lowes, a Scottish Wildlife Trust reserve near Dunkeld, where we

had three **Red Squirrels** on the feeders at the visitor centre. From one of the hides we saw three or four **Fallow Deer** sheltering amongst trees and a female Osprey with her two chicks were hunkered well down in their tree top nest. Loch of the Lowes is now another really good place for watching Beavers, particularly in the summer. We then went to Loch of Kinnordy, Backwater Reservoir and Loch of Lintruthen without seeing anything in particular and it was still raining and still very windy. We then decided to give Glenshee a visit despite the atrocious weather and poor visibility. However, it was a good move as we managed to find four **Mountain Hares** and sheltering in a narrow steep sided valley a herd of 40 **Red Deer**, plus Red Grouse, Ring Ouzel and Wheatear. All this without leaving the car and going up only as far as the first ski lift.

We then decided to go to Bob's Pine Marten hide, again pre-arranged with Bob, arriving at 17:00 at least an hour earlier than we were going to but thought we might as well sit in a hide there as sit in the car somewhere else watching the rain. As it happened the rain eased and then stopped but it was still blowing a hooley! Bob said he might join us in the hide but had some personal business to attend to so might not make it. However, he had told us the night before where to find the peanuts and other bird food to stock up the bird feeders and where to put peanuts and chicken eggs for the Martens. So we sat in the hide and waited and waited as the wind rocked the trees and swept through the feeding area. Obviously we were a little concerned whether a Marten would show up at all. Bob told us that most days the Martens had been coming to the feeding area around 19:30 and was usually a female with two youngsters. After 4 hours all we had seen was two **Red Squirrels** a **Bank Vole** and some **Wood Mice**. Bob called in to see how things were going but couldn't stay, fortunately he told us about a couple of lights that we could hang on

hooks on the outside of the hide before it got too dark. We did this about 22:00 and sat back again and waited. When it was dark the lights worked a treat and gave us a clear view of the feeding area in front of the hide. The wind eased a little as it got later and finally a **Pine Marten** appeared at 23:10, snuffling about a bit before making off with a chicken egg. It visited the feeding area three times before we finally left the hide just after 01:00. Happy, but tired, we switched off the lights, locked up the hide and drove back to the Travelodge. Driving back we saw a couple each of **Red, Roe and Fallow Deer**.

The following four Pine Marten photos were taken by Bob Smith from his hide. It is the same female that myself and Paul saw only the photos were taken a couple of weeks earlier than our visit.

If you want to look for Beavers and/or Pine Martens with Bob email him at: <mailto:r.smith50@sky.com> he does charge a fee, but Paul and I thoroughly recommend him. Also check out: <http://www.scottishwildbeavers.org.uk>







Friday 30 June. A late start and a leisurely day today and although we still travelled quite a few miles the only mammals we saw all day were **Rabbits**. At least it wasn't raining and the wind had abated. We started off with a brief visit to the River Almond, a tributary of the River Tay, on the north side of Perth which has Beavers, unfortunately we didn't see any but it wasn't the best time of day to look to be honest. We moved on driving a little way north. We checked out some moorland near Enochdhu but only saw Red Grouse and a Short-eared Owl. At nearby Loch na Creige we watched two super looking summer plumaged Black-throated Divers. Finally we made our way back to Glasgow for our 20:50 flight back to Stansted Airport.

July



Well grown **Fox cubs** in my garden - these two visited together most evenings in late summer into early winter.

Wednesday 5th July. Did a brief trip to Wallasea Island where I saw three **Brown Hares** and 46 **Harbour Seals**, including some new born pups, on their haul out mud bank. During the breeding season the best place to see the seals on Wallasea is from the south east corner of the island, just make for the shelter on the seawall - note it's a long walk! The seals are on the other side of a creek and are actually on Foulness Island, with common sense, a little care and a bit of stealth you won't disturb them. Another option to see the seals is to

go on a seal watching boat trip from Wallasea Marina. I've been on a couple of trips in the past and they are well worth it. You can almost be guaranteed sightings of Harbour Seals with some great opportunities for photography. Grey Seals are sometimes encountered and occasionally Harbour Porpoises. So check out the website for all the information on the trips. For details see: Seals & Wildlife Trips <http://www.charterdiscovery.co.uk> In June this year 22 pups were counted and in July the maximum count of seals was 74. All the following photos of Harbour Seals were taken in 2017 in the creeks around Wallasea Island by a friend, Graham Mee, whilst on the boat trips. Graham regularly rides 'shotgun' for Steve the skipper.







The rusty pelage colour on some Essex seals is caused by oxidation. It is thought to be caused by an accumulation of iron on the outer surface of the hair that causes it to turn red, although there appears to be no physiological effect on the animals.

Friday 8th July. Went to Cornwall with a couple of friends in the hope of seeing an Amur Falcon but dipped! Did see a **Fox** and two **Roe Deer** near Hayle though. Also saw two **Foxes** in the early hours as I was driving through Leigh-on-Sea after the trip.

Tuesday 11th July - Sunday 23rd July, Brazil. Trip report by Richard Webb on mammalwatching.com.

Wednesday 26th July. Hanningfield Reservoir with the Essex Bat Group. A good count of 1,309 **Soprano Pipistrelles** leaving the maternity roost.

Monday 31st July. Norfolk for a couple of days with my friend Paul Baker. We stayed in Cromer on the North Norfolk coast where Paul has a holiday let which he uses when it isn't booked.

Driving through the Brecks, between Barton Mills roundabout and Thetford on the A11 we spotted three **Muntjac**. This is the relatively new stretch of A11 dual carriageway and has become a regular place to see Muntjac feeding in the adjacent fields as you drive by. **Roe Deer** can also be seen and occasionally **Red Deer**. In the early afternoon we were in the car park of Holt Country Park to look at some butterflies, we were soon watching 20+ Silver-washed Fritillaries, including the pale Halice form. Plus, amongst some other species, White Admiral, Painted Lady and Grayling and a couple of good moth species: two Hummingbird Hawk-moths and a Broad-bordered Bee Hawk-moth. In the late afternoon we were at the north Norfolk marshes on a track called the Iron Road just west of Salthouse where we spotted a **Chinese Water Deer** - a bit distant but a fair view. We also saw a buck **Roe Deer** just inland from Salthouse on farmland.

In the evening just as it was getting dark we went looking for Midwife Toads (an introduced non-native amphibian). I reckon we heard at least 10 males calling before finally, after about an hour of trying, I caught 2 which was no mean feat given how elusive they were.

August

Tuesday 1st August. Still in Norfolk we visited various sites along the coast but really only seeing birds and a few butterfly species the best being Chalkhill Blues at Warham Iron Age Fort. From the seawall at Stiffkey Fen we looked across the creeks and saltmarsh to Blackney Point where around 50 **Harbour Seals** had hauled out on their

breeding beaches. We drove home late afternoon. Best birds of the trip: Garganey, Spoonbill, Wood Sandpiper, Stone Curlew, Goshawk, Red Kite, Montague's Harrier, Nightjars, Dartford Warblers.

Monday 7th August. Belfairs Wood (also known as Hadleigh Great Wood), Leigh-on-Sea. Came across a **Muntjac** whilst I was walking through the woods, at 07:30, but unfortunately it was only a brief view. Muntjac are present in all my local woods but are pretty well exclusively nocturnal, probably due to constant disturbance by the many, many dog walkers.



Three Badgers on garden trail cam, two are easy to see the third has its back to the camera and is just left of the left Badger.

Monday 14th August. Leigh-on-Sea. Went to a friend's house at dusk not far from my house and watched three **Noctule Bats** flying high and direct over his house. Every August he gets Noctules flying over coming from the north west heading south east - presumably from a roost to a feeding area. We also saw five **Common Pipistrelles** flitting about.

Wednesday 16th August. Visited a local Badger sett and at 20:17 and was rewarded with a **Badger** at the sett entrance whilst it was still fairly light. Later when I had left the sett I saw two **Badgers** and a **Fox** foraging in an adjacent meadow.

Saturday 19th August. Belfairs Wood, Leigh-on-Sea. Met up with the Southend Dormouse Group. We checked 100 Dormice nest boxes as part of the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme (NDMP) and rather sadly only found one **Hazel Dormouse**. By contrast on a count I helped with about eight years ago we found 26 Dormice in half the number of boxes. The good news is that 9 adults and 10 young Dormice were found on a count in October in a different part of the wood with new nest boxes not in the NDMP.



Hazel Dormouse, Belfairs Wood, Leigh-on-Sea

Saturday 26th August. Canvey Island, Canvey Point at the eastern end of the Island. I was there for nearly 2 hours and saw up to six **Harbour Porpoises** and a **Grey Seal**. In the evening, not on Canvey, I watched six **Common Pipistrelles** feeding along a local woodland ride.

September

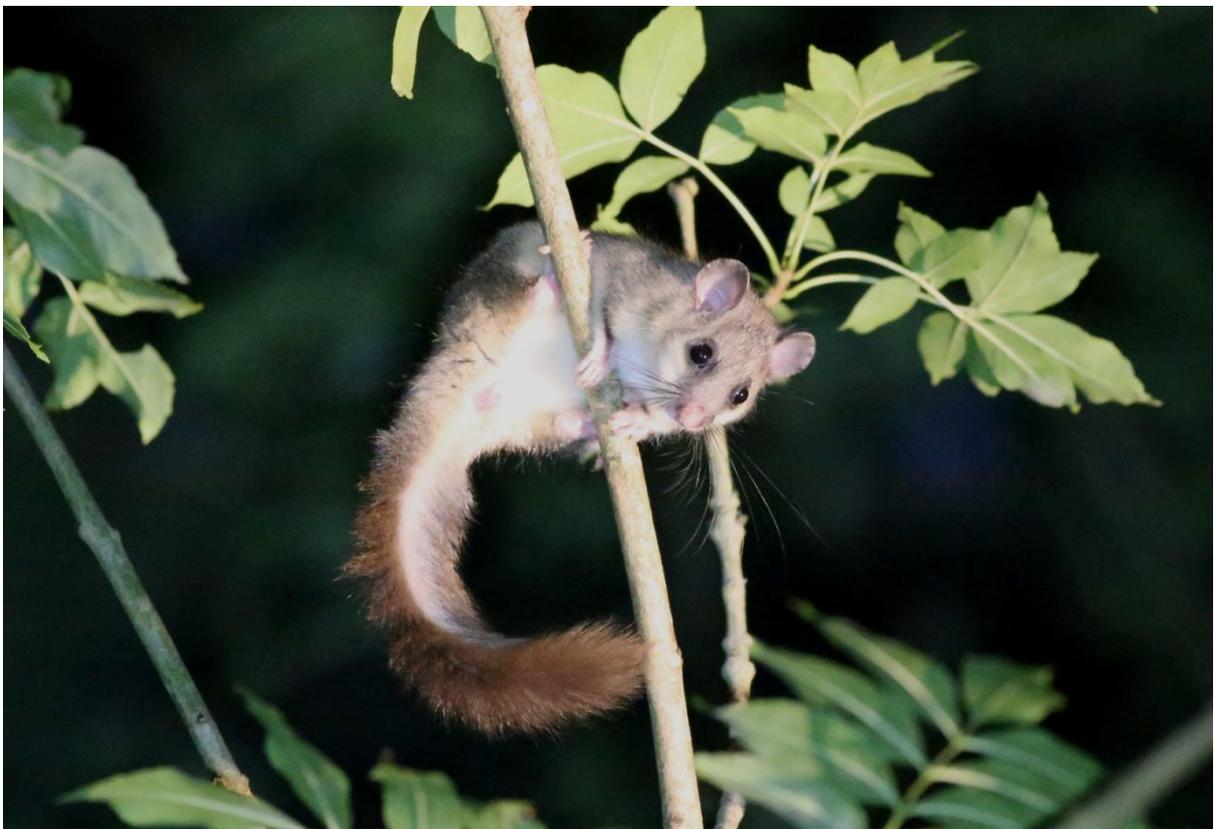
Tuesday 5th September. Drove to Whitby, North Yorkshire with my wife for a spot of whale watching, stayed there for two nights.

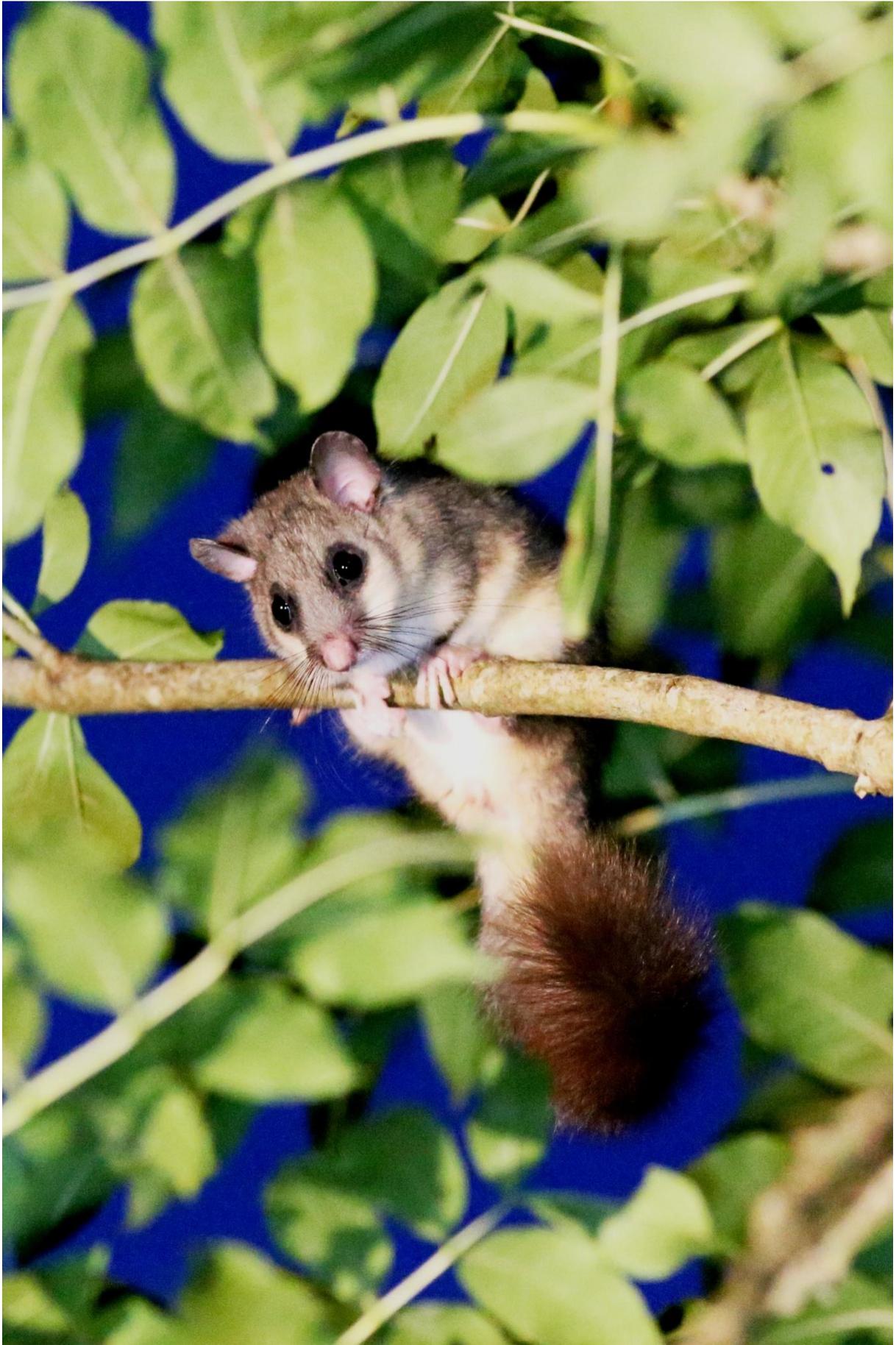
Wednesday 6th September. Went out on a morning whale watching trip from 09:30 - 13:45. Saw one **Minke Whale**, three **Porpoise** and four **Grey Seals**. We were booked on an afternoon trip the following day but due to a poor weather prediction it was cancelled. So we had the option of our money back or going out again this afternoon. We did the obvious thing and after grabbing a cup of coffee and a sandwich we set off again out to sea at 14:30. The afternoon trip turned out to be much better as we saw a minimum of eight **Minke Whales** plus seven **Grey Seals**. I can thoroughly recommend this whale watching trip which in reality is only for Minke Whales. Full details can be found at <http://www.whitbywhalewatching.net/>

Tuesday 11th September. Wendover Woods, The Chilterns, Buckinghamshire. Went with Paul Baker to look for Edible Dormouse. On the way we saw a few **Fallow Deer** as we drove around the northern section of the M25 and at the side of the road in Wendover Woods a **Muntjac**. We struggled for the Dormouse as it was a horrible evening, windy and wet and in fact we had to shelter in the car at one point the rain was that heavy. However, we persevered and finally tracked down one **Edible Dormouse**. Last year myself, Paul and another friend Tim Bourne went about a week earlier on a fine dry warm night and we saw at least six and heard many others.



Above Edible Dormouse photo taken by Paul with mobile phone through hand held binoculars, September 2017. Photos below by Tim Bourne, one of the six Edible Dormice we saw in 2016.





Wednesday 20th September. Hanningfield Reservoir. Unfortunately I couldn't get there for the Soprano Pipistrelle count (265 were counted) but the Essex Bat Group were taking part in the Nathusius' Pipistrelle project and so had set up a couple of Harp traps. I arrived at 21:00 and shortly after they caught a **Nathusius' Pipistrelle** but nothing more before packing up around 22:30.

For more information on the project see:

http://www.bats.org.uk/pages/national_nathusius_pipistrelle_project.html

Friday 22nd September. Back to Norfolk for three nights with Paul Baker, staying again at Cromer. Early evening Cley East Bank - two **Brown Hares**, a **Chinese Water Deer**, and what looked like a **Noctule Bat** plus a few **Pipistrelles** either Common or Soprano but stupidly I didn't have my bat detector with me. On adjacent farmland there were two **Roe Deer** - a buck and doe.

Saturday 23rd September. Back on the east bank at Cley, 09:00 - 10:00. The east bank is an embankment/footpath at the eastern end of Cley Marshes, about 600 metres east of the Cley Marshes Visitor Centre. The bank runs north from the A149 Coast Road to the beach, there is a very small car park. It is dissected by a channel called the new cut that runs east-west and goes under the bank at a sluice - which is where you stand to look for Otters. Anyway as we looked east along the new cut we picked up three **Otters** an adult female plus two well grown cubs. The cubs stayed some way off but the adult eventually swam/fished her way down the cut towards us and gave excellent views, we could even hear her crunching on the crabs she caught.



The female Otter that came all the way down the eastern section of the new cut to check us out. Paul took this photo on his mobile phone through hand held binoculars.

In the early afternoon we made our way to Stiffkey Fen and from the seawall looking across to Blackney Point we could see approx 200 Seals hauled out - a mix of **Common** and **Grey Seals**. We moved on west along the coast to Titchwell RSPB reserve where we watched a **Chinese Water Deer** feeding on the edge of the marsh. Best bird of the weekend was a Yellow-browed Warbler.

Sunday 24th September. We drove towards Cley east bank again this morning to see if the Otters were showing. At 08:10 as we past Weybourne, two **Muntjac** a doe with a fawn in tow crossed the road in front of our car. We arrived at the east bank sluice around 08:30 and at 10:00 an adult **Otter** appeared fishing in the west section of the new cut. It showed extremely well and came quite close before disappearing into thick reeds at 10:45.

During the rest of the day we explored the north Norfolk marshes and various sites along the coast but the only mammals seen were a few **Brown Hares**. The best bird we saw was a Red-breasted Flycatcher.

Monday 25th September. On the drive home from Cromer in the late afternoon all we saw was a **Roe Deer** in a field just south of Brandon, in the Brecks. In the evening I set my trail cam up in my garden.



A Fox and two Badgers in my garden, Tuesday 26th September.

Wednesday 27th September. In the evening I visited a local wood and staked out a Badger sett and scored with good views of three **Badgers**. The following morning I checked a couple of my Longworth traps I had set the night before in the same wood and found a **Wood Mouse** in one and a **Yellow-necked Mouse** in the other.

Thursday 28th September. Watched 1 **Badger** and 3 **Foxes** in my garden in the early hours of the morning.



Yellow-necked Mouse after I retrieved it from my Longworth trap set in a local wood, 27th September. Phone photo John Wright.

October

Tuesday 3rd October. Two Tree Island, Leigh-on-Sea. An early evening walk produced two **Common Pipistrelles** and a few **Rabbits**.

Wednesday 4th October. Hanningfield Reservoir with the Essex Bat Group. The number of **Soprano Pipistrelles** emerging from the

maternity roost had, as expected, dropped to 65. Two Harp traps had been erected and we caught 2 **Soprano Pipistrelles** and two **Nathusias' Pipistrelles** before packing up at 23:15. I saw a **Fox** just as I drove out of the car park on my way home.

Friday 6th October. Minsmere RSPB reserve, Suffolk. I stopped at Westleton Heath for an hour from first light to see how the Red Deer rut was going. There were four mature **Red Deer** stags doing their thing of parallel walking, chasing and bellowing but no actual combat. There was also two immature stags hanging around but keeping their distance and 18 hinds that the stags were trying to impress.

I then went to the Island Mere Hide to look for Otters, arriving at 07:40. At 08:15 an **Otter** swam and fished its way across the mere and was on show for at least 10 minutes before disappearing in the reeds. I stayed around the reserve till about midday but didn't see anything of note.

Monday 9th October. Dorset. I stayed on Portland at the Portland Bird Observatory again. I drove to Portland via Durlleston Head, Swanage, to look for Bottle-nosed Dolphins but after 3 hours of scanning I drew a blank. On the way to Portland I made another stop and called in at Lodmoor RSPB reserve, Weymouth, to have a look at a Lesser Yellowlegs.

In the early evening I went to Radipole Lake RSPB reserve, in Weymouth, to look for Otters - I didn't see any. However, by coincidence I met the Dorset Bat Group just as they were setting up four Harp traps with the aim of capturing and ringing Nathusius' Pipistrelles as part of the Nat Pip project. So, very kindly they let me join them for the evening which turned out to be very productive with 17 **Nathusius' Pipistrelles** caught and processed by the time we

packed up just after mid-night. Over the last three sessions at Radipole Lake they have caught 35 Nat Pips. But I believe tonight was to be the final trapping session of the year at this site at least.

Tuesday 10th October. Portland and area. Pretty quiet through the day, however I did drop in at Abbotsbury Swannery to look at a Spotted Sandpiper and a couple of Cattle Egrets. In the evening I decided to go back to Radipole Lake, again to look for Otters, I had my bat detector with me. No Otters yet again but I detected three **Nathusius' Pipistrelles** and from a low bridge watched up to eight **Daubenton's Bats** flitting across the lake surface.

Wednesday 11th October. In the late afternoon I drove to Otterton in South Devon to look for Beavers/Otters on the River Otter but didn't see either! All I saw was a **Fox** that crossed the road when I was on my way back to Portland.

Thursday 12th October. I left Portland in the morning to make my way home, via Purbeck stopping in at Middlebere to have a look at a Stilt Sandpiper, then Durlston Head to look for Dolphins. I scanned the sea for about two hours but didn't see any. Late afternoon I went to nearby Arne RSPB reserve first to look at a flock of 60 Spoonbills and then, in the early evening to check out the Sika Deer rut. In one field there were about 30 **Sika Deer** consisting mainly of hinds with well grown calves, there was a white hind that had a calf with it that tried to suckle on a couple of occasions. The hinds were being herded and chased about by a fine looking mature stag. As it was the rut, the stag frequently called in that squeaky bellow, which is nowhere as deep as the rutting bellow of the closely related Red Deer. The stag bellowed, thrashed the vegetation and occasionally saw off a couple of immature stags that stoically refused to go very far. Nearby a lone mature stag, again a fine looking animal, was

bellowing, thrashing some low bushes and wallowing in the dirt in the hope of attracting in some hinds or in an attempt to intimidate the other stag. In the surrounding woods I could hear at least two other stags bellowing. I left when it was too dark to see any more and got home about 23:00.



Sika Deer, hind with well grown calf, I actually took this photo at Arne in 2016.



Muntjac doe in local wood. I left one of my trail cams set up for a few days whilst I was in Norfolk.

Tuesday 17th October. Norfolk again with Paul Baker. A small detour en route for some birds meant we dropped in on Long-billed Dowitcher, Wilson's Phalarope and a Red-necked Grebe. Driving through the Brecks we saw a **Muntjac** and five **Roe Deer** as we drove along the A11 Barton Mills to Thetford stretch.

Wednesday 18th October. Norfolk - it rained most of the day. We saw three **Brown Hares** in fields at Burnham Overy on the north coast. At Stubbs Mill, Hickling Broad, Norfolk Naturalist Trust (NNT) reserve at dusk we saw three **Chinese Water Deer** and a few **Rabbits**. Four Common Cranes came in to roost.

Thursday 19th October. Norfolk still. We staked out Cley east bank sluice between 11:00 and 12:00 and saw two **Otters**. One showed briefly at the west end of the new cut (looking towards Cley beach car park) but the second Otter, at the east end of the new cut (looking towards Salthouse), showed for 20 minutes as it fished the channel.



A Holkham Park Fallow Buck relaxing. Taken on my mobile phone.

We had a walk through Holkham Park to look at the 100+ park **Fallow Deer** which were half heartedly rutting - the bucks giving their belching like rutting challenges - but mainly just lazing around.

In Holkham Woods which is at the end of Lady Anne's Drive opposite Holkham Park entrance we saw a **Muntjac**. On the drive home we saw four **Muntjac** - a single and then three browsing together on a road verge - as we went through the Brecks in the Thetford area.

Wednesday 25th October. Two Tree Island, Leigh-on-Sea. On an evening walk I only saw four **Common Pipistrelles**.

Tuesday 31st October. Dorset. I stayed at Portland Bird Observatory. In the evening I went to Radipole Lake RSPB reserve, Weymouth, and watched eight **Daubenton's Bats** and four **Soprano Pipistrelles** (I had my bat detector), a **Water Vole** and a couple of **Brown Rats**. Didn't see much of interest the following day before I left for home in the afternoon.

November

Thursday 9th November. Stayed local and counted 12 **Harbour Seals** on the sandbank off Westcliff seafront in the morning at low tide. In the afternoon, when the tide was in, I watched a **Grey Seal** off Gunners Park, Shoeburyness.

Tuesday 14th November. Westcliff seafront in the morning - 11 **Harbour Seals** on the sandbank.

Thursday 16th November. Back to Norfolk with Paul Baker. At Happisburgh on the N.E. coast we noted four **Grey Seals** offshore.

Friday 17th November. Stubbs Mill, Hickling Broad NNT reserve late afternoon till dark - two **Chinese Water Deer** were feeding out on

the marsh and showed well in the early evening. As we drove away from the reserve we were about 2 miles down the road when two **Chinese Water Deer** literally came tumbling into the road in front of us fortunately we stopped just in time. One was slightly smaller than the other and after it picked itself up off the road made a hasty getaway through a hole in the roadside hedge. The other bigger animal just stood in the road lit up in the headlights, it was a male as we could see the obvious 'tusks' but after a short time it trotted off into the field where they had both just tumbled from. As the Water Deer rut starts around December it was possibly two bucks fighting or the buck pursuing a doe.

Saturday 18th November. Not a lot on the mammal front today just a couple of **Grey Seals** off Cley.

Sunday 19th November. Cley east bank from 10:00 - 11:00. At 10:25 we watched an **Otter** fishing for just over 5 minutes way down the eastern section of the new cut.

In the afternoon driving home through the Brecks we had a **Roe Deer** north of Thetford, a **Muntjac** in Thetford Forest and two **Muntjac** in a wood near Euston, Suffolk.

Saturday 25th November. Local today, Westcliff seafront - 12 **Harbour Seals** hauled out on the sandbank. Watched a **Badger** in my garden snuffling around for peanuts at 23:00.

Sunday 26th November. Late afternoon there were 30+ **Fallow Deer** by junction 29 of the M25. I was returning from seeing a Horned Lark (American race of Shore Lark) at Staines Reservoir, west London.

Tuesday 28th November. Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire.

I last went to the Forest of Dean for one day in April 2015 to look for Wild Boar - which I did see. So thought it was time to go back and have another look. It may seem strange to many mammal watchers outside the UK to drive for 3.5 hours just to see Wild Boar but they still only have a toe hold in Britain and the Forest of Dean is probably the best place to see them despite heavy culling taking place in the forest. I arrived at first light at a small car park by the Cyril Hart Arboretum, just east of the Speech House Hotel, on the B4226, Speech House Road. I stopped here following a tip off from Mark Hows that an adult sow was spending a lot of time adjacent to the car park and was generally easy to see. She wasn't there first thing so I went for a walk through the arboretum and into the woods the other side. I found a small herd of **Fallow Deer**, four **Roe Deer** a **Muntjac** and **Grey Squirrels** and had brief views of three **Wild Boar** crossing the track. On my return to the car park I saw the solitary **Wild Boar** sow about 50 metres away and so approached slowly. I needn't have worried as she was so confiding, relaxed and totally un-phased by me, she allowed a very close approach as she snuffled through the leaf litter. After about half an hour in her company I moved on and walked various forest trails at New Fancy View and Nagshead RSPB reserve but didn't see much in particular except more **Grey Squirrels**. I spent the night in a small hotel in Littledean, Cinderford.

Wednesday 29th November. I went back to the arboretum car park around 09:00 but there was no sign of the sow Boar. So after 15 minutes I drove off and walked various forest trails for a couple of hours but didn't see anything of note. However, I thought I'd go back at around 11:00 for a last look for the sow before driving home - but she still wasn't there. As I left the car park I turned right and pulled

into a car park about 200 metres along the road on the left for a quick look. No sow but six yearling **Wild Boar** snuffling through the fallen leaves. They were a fine sight as their warm brown coats blended in with the russet leaves and bracken in the bright sunshine of a cold frosty morning. These too were confiding and relaxed about my presence.

I got home late afternoon, in the evening at 22:30 I sat and watched a **Badger** in my garden munching on peanuts.



The confiding sow, Forest of Dean.



The sow above and the yearlings below, Forest of Dean.





All Wild Boar photos John Wright.

For more information on the Forest of Dean Wild Boar see:

<http://friendsoftheboar.blogspot.co.uk/>

December

Friday 1st December. Checked my garden trail cam and there had been a **Badger** in my garden in the early hours. I then spent 3 hours in the morning over high tide at Canvey Point (Canvey Island). No Porpoises but two **Grey Seals** plus a Little Auk and 140 Red-throated Divers which is quite an impressive total of Red-throated Divers locally. Late afternoon, at low tide, I checked out the **Harbour Seals** at Westcliff - there were six hauled out.



Muntjac buck in local wood.

I had left one of my trail cams set up in a local wood from the 4th - 12th December but it only captured Muntjac and Foxes.

Tuesday 5th December. Santon Downham, Suffolk, River Little Ouse. This is the same stretch of river I visited on 3rd April. It turned out to be a very successful day as I saw four Otters. As I crossed over the river via the road bridge I was actually now in Norfolk. I started walking west along the river bank soon after it got light and after a slow 25 minute walk I came across three **Otters** - a female with two cubs. I followed them along the river as the female hunted amongst the branches of overhanging and fallen bank side trees. The cubs more often than not sitting on branches or matted water vegetation and squeaking excitedly every time their mother appeared. After 35 minutes or so of great Otter watching I left them to it. I returned to the road bridge and then walked some woodland trails for a couple of hours but didn't see anything of note. Returning to the river I walked east this time and met someone who said they had just seen an Otter further along the river. It wasn't long before I found the **Otter** and although showing well at times it was sometimes difficult to see as it hunted amongst overhanging branches but I watched it for at least 20 minutes. It is probably a young female and in my opinion the same Otter I had seen on April 3rd, when it was half grown, with its mother. I'm also sure the female with the two young cubs I watched a few hours earlier is the same adult breeding female in both cases. My assumption is this young female is now independent but sharing its mother's territory and today at least was about a 1.5k up-river from her.

The following five photos I took show the two cubs and one shows the mother and you can just see the (blurry!) cubs either side of her.







Friday 8th December. I went back to Santon Downham, River Little Ouse, this time with friends Paul Baker and Max Hellicar. They wanted to try for the Otters but also to look for some Parrot Crossbills frequenting the area, which we did see - a flock of at least 16.

We didn't get time to go west down river from the road bridge to look for the female with the two cubs but we did find the young female **Otter** not far where I watched her three days earlier. We enjoyed fabulous views of her hunting for around 15 minutes before she began moving up river and so we left her to it.

Late afternoon on the way home we stopped at a small wood near Euston, Suffolk and saw three **Muntjac**.

Two photos below by Max Hellicar of the young female Otter, Friday 8th December.



Wednesday 13th December. A vixen was calling/screaming frequently in back gardens behind my house - the vulpine mating season gets under way. In the early hours of Thursday (14th) at least one **Badger** was in my garden and caught on the trail cam (below).



Friday 15th December. In the afternoon I lifted up a piece of corrugated tin on my compost heap and had three **Wood Mice** staring back at me. In the evening between 23:00 and 23:30 I watched a **Badger** and two **Foxes** in my garden eating peanuts.

Sunday 24th December. Westcliff seafront. At low tide there were 15 **Harbour Seals** hauled out on the sandbank. A brief visit to Bowers Marsh RSPB reserve, Pitsea, only produced a distant **Red Fox**. Later I caught a **Wood Mouse** upstairs in my house and released it in the garden - it will probably be back! To be fair in the winter they rarely enter my house they tend to make do with the garden shed.



Above the Wood Mouse I caught in my house and released in the garden. Below a distant Red Fox, Bowers Marsh RSPB reserve.



Monday 25th December. So this is Christmas - whilst quaffing a nice glass of red wine I watched this **Badger** snaffling peanuts in my garden. Merry Christmas, cheers.



Christmas Badger.

Wednesday 27th December. One **Badger**, two **Foxes** and two **Wood Mice** all noted in my garden today.

Friday 29th December. Westcliff seafront in the afternoon at low tide - seven **Harbour Seals** were hauled out.

Saturday 30th December. Spent a few hours in the afternoon walking around Canvey Wick (Canvey Island) which is jointly managed by the RSPB and Buglife. Best find was a **Pygmy Shrew**

under a reptile refuge mat. Apart from that I saw a few **Rabbits** and a **Fox**.

Sunday 31st December. Last day of the year. I went to Canvey Point for a couple of hours and saw two **Grey Seals** and one **Harbour Seal**. In the afternoon in a horse paddock near Belfairs Wood I watched three **Foxes**.



My Spur-thighed Tortoise checking out a Wood Mouse in my garden, summer 2017.

The End

