

## Notes on Somerset Mammalia

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*Recorder for Mammals to the South-Western Naturalists' Union.*

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STUDENTS of British Mammals have always been few in comparison with, for example, ornithologists or entomologists. This is partly accounted for, perhaps, by the fact that the majority of the commoner species are neither very spectacular nor very easy to observe, most of them being decidedly elusive and largely nocturnal in their habits. Consequently there remain many imperfections in the existing knowledge of their life-histories and ecology, and in many districts of the British Islands the distribution of all but the most universally occurring or conspicuous species can only be sketched in a vague and imperfect fashion, on the basis of a few scattered and quite inadequate observations. Somerset is no exception to the general rule. A useful list of the Mammals of Somerset by H. J. Charbonnier is published in the *Victoria County History, Somerset*, vol. 1 (1906), and a later and slightly fuller paper by the same author and C. King Rudge appeared in 1909,<sup>1</sup> but even these, though containing much of value, only serve to emphasize how very little precise information is available in the case of a number of species. Not infrequently it is only possible to state in a vague way that certain species are local and to add one or two isolated records. Yet the mere fact that they *are* local suggests points of interest in their ecology and invites a closer investigation than most of them have yet received. Several species are undoubtedly

1. *Proc. Brist. Nat. Soc.*, 4th series, Vol. II, pp. 55-60.

## BATS.

If the smaller terrestrial mammalia have received inadequate attention, this is even more conspicuously the case with the Bats. They do not lend themselves very readily to study and the imperfections in current knowledge of the distribution and natural history of the twelve recognized British species are considerable. The existence of only a single record for a district does not necessarily imply that the species is very rare. The comparative neglect by naturalists which they suffer (or enjoy) is accounted for partly no doubt by the fact that, with one or two exceptions, they are not readily distinguished from one another on the wing, partly by the difficulty of capturing or shooting them, and of discovering the retreats in which they secrete themselves during their periods of inactivity. Where they resort to caves, as the majority do at times and the Horseshoes generally, they are comparatively easy to locate, but few who have hunted for them will dispute that those which make use of hollow trees, houses, etc., contrive to be curiously elusive in their places of retirement. The following list summarizes such additional information as has become available since the publication of Charbonnier's list in 1906. The relative abundance and distribution of even the commoner species is not well known and more precise data are needed. Definite localities are therefore quoted as far as possible.

NOCTULE BAT. *Nyctalus noctula* (Schreber).

Apparently local, but widely distributed. A woodland and tree-haunting species in summer, seeking "winter quarters amongst houses or ruins," but not in caves.<sup>1</sup> Wookey Hole (S. Lewis). The statement that Noctules, amongst other species, "live and no doubt breed" in the cave (*Zoologist*, 1906, p. 69) was based on a misapprehension. It was inferred that they did so on account of their being seen, as Mr. Lewis kindly informs the writer, associating with the Horseshoes, or at all events flying in the same place and time over the water at the entrance to the cave, but the only specimens taken were from a sheltered spot on the cliffs.

1. Barrett-Hamilton, *British Mammals*, Vol. I, p. 65.

Considered generally distributed in the Bristol district by Charbonnier in 1909; no more recent information. One found by Mr. A. C. Gould hanging on a tree near Horner in October, and probably really not uncommon about the wooded combs of the Exmoor district (N. G. Hadden).

LEISLER'S BAT. *Nyctalus leisleri* (Kuhl).

One at Winscombe in 1915. Confirmed by Mr. M. A. C. Hinton, of the British Museum. (J. Wiglesworth, *Zoologist*, 1915, p. 432.)

PIPISTRELLE BAT. *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* (Schreber).

Common and often assumed to be everywhere the most abundant species, but certain observations in the Bath and Bristol districts<sup>1</sup> seem to indicate that in some localities it may be replaced to a great extent by the Whiskered Bat. An enquiry into the status of these two species in other parts of the county is desirable.

[DAUBENTON'S BAT. *Myotis daubentoni* (Kuhl).

“Probably an abundant species in every part of England affording suitable combinations of water and woods” (Barrett-Hamilton). It is still unrecorded for Somerset, but it may be confidently expected that it will be found if searched for. It haunts the immediate vicinity of water, especially water with well-timbered banks.]

WHISKERED BAT. *Myotis mystacinus* (Kuhl).

Probably very generally distributed and more common than the Pipistrelle in some places. More information wanted. A large colony near Keynsham in 1888 (Charbonnier), Cheddar and other Mendip Caves (P. Buxton<sup>2</sup> and T. A. Coward).<sup>3</sup> Taken in hibernation at Ashton (two specimens), Dundry (one), and one shot at Cannington, near Bridgwater (C. Tuckett). Litton (B.W.T.).

1. Rev. L. Blomfield (Jenyns), quoted by Harting, *Zoologist*, 1888, p. 164. Lloyd-Morgan and Charbonnier in *British Association Handbook to Bristol*, 1898.

2. *Zoologist*, 1907, p. 193.

3. *Proc. Zool. Soc.*, 1907.

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NATTERER'S BAT. *Myotis nattereri* (Kuhl).

A male taken at Queen Camel, June 4th, 1906 (Robert H. Read, *Zoologist*, 1906, p. 312). Now in the British Museum.

LONG-EARED BAT. *Plecotus auritus* (Linn.).

Common and generally distributed.

BARBASTELLE BAT. *Barbastella barbastellus* (Schreber).

One received from Cheddar by Mr. F. H. L. Whish, of Lympsham, March 28th, 1921. Measurements as follows: Length of head and body, 49mm.; tail, 49mm.; foot, 9mm.; ear, 16mm. One, Fitzhead, April 24th, 1924 (Miss M. M. Selman).

This species was previously recorded from a "Mendip cave" (*i.e.* Wookey Hole), by Mr. S. Lewis in 1906,<sup>1</sup> and from the roof of Wells Cathedral.<sup>2</sup>

Miss Selman's specimen was disturbed by a workman under the roof-tiles of a house. It appeared dazed by the light and he easily caught it. It was a fine specimen and had evidently ceased hibernation, as there was no layer of fat under the skin and it contained remains of food.

GREATER HORSESHOE BAT. *Rhinolophus ferrum-equinum* (Schreber).

In addition to its well-known haunts in the Mendip caves and Wells Cathedral it is recorded from Clevedon and Hampton Rocks, near Bath (Charbonnier), Winscombe (J. Wigglesworth),<sup>3</sup> Clifton (Eagle Clarke) and Taunton (Millais). Mr. C. Tuckett adds Ashton, Dundry, Banwell and a cave near Enmore, Quantocks. In the three first-named localities he was at first led to regard it as scarce, only two being taken at Ashton, one in 1922 at Dundry and three at Banwell in 1923. But in December, 1923, he found only two Lessers in the whole of the Ashton cave and over sixty Greaters in about two square yards. These were certainly not present in the previous year, and it is suggested that they were driven from a cave on the other side of the river where blasting was in progress.

1. *Zoologist*, 1906, p. 69.

2. A. G. Berry quoted in Millais, *Mammals of Gt. Britain and Ireland*, Vol. I, p. 43.

3. *Proc. Som. Arch. & N.H. Soc.*, LXIX, lxxii.

LESSER HORSESHOE BAT. *Rhinolophus hipposideros* (Bechstein).

With the previous species in the Mendip caves. Also at Dundry and Shepton Mallet (Charbonnier). Ashton, Dundry and Banwell, very common (C. Tuckett). About fifteen seen hanging from the roof of an old boathouse along the Culbone shore, West Somerset, July 29th, 1925 (E. W. Hendy). One found hibernating in an old boathouse near Glenthorne several years ago (N. G. Hadden); evidently the same place. A fine albino specimen was taken at Banwell by Mr. C. Tuckett on November 24th, 1923, and is in his possession.

#### OTHER MAMMALIA.

PIGMY SHREW. *Sorex minutus* (Linn.).

Widely, but possibly somewhat unevenly, distributed, and not very readily trapped. Leigh Woods is the other locality definitely specified by Charbonnier. Lymsham, several taken from time to time (F. H. L. Whish), Ivythorn, near Street!<sup>1</sup> (E. Page), Martock! (A. Vassall), Cannington, not uncommon (H. Slater), Porlock! (E. W. Hendy). One picked up dead on Yearnor Moor some years ago (N. G. Hadden); probably really frequent in the Porlock district.

WATER-SHREW. *Neomys fodiens* (Schreber).

Widely distributed; more details wanted. Charbonnier mentions Leigh Woods and the Yeo at Nailsea. Colonies exist at Chewton Mendip in certain small field ponds, at one of which I had the animals under observation in the summer of 1925. This is a quite small pond with three sides of old loose stonework overgrown with moss and weeds, having a muddy bottom and containing *Potamogeton*, *Callitriche* and duckweed. The water is not always particularly clear, especially at the shallow end, where the bottom slopes gradually up to the ground-level of the field, so that it is not always easy to see the animals in the water except when close to the surface. They have holes and burrows amongst the stonework. It appears contrary to

1. This sign is used as in Botanical, Entomological and other lists to indicate that the record is personally confirmed by the writer.

the ordinary habits of the Water-Shrew to colonize such places and I know of no parallel case. I have caught and handled specimens from this colony. Male taken in 1922 at Hardington Mandeville, but not met with there before or since (A. Vassall). Seen on the Turf Moor, where it is probably common (H. Slater). Cheddar (B. W. T.). Only noticed on the banks of the Horner in the Porlock district (N. G. Hadden).

**BANK MOUSE OR BANK VOLE.** *Evotomys glareolus* (Schreber).

The history of the Bank Vole is peculiar. First recognized as a British animal by Yarrell in 1832 it was long supposed to be comparatively rare and each new occurrence was formally recorded. It is now known to be a widely distributed and numerous species, though possibly rather more "patchy" in its distribution than the Short-tailed Vole and showing a preference for sheltered hedgebanks, woods, gardens, etc., rather than open fields. More detailed and precise data on its distribution in the county are needed. Charbonnier considered it "hardly uncommon, but local," but only quotes one locality definitely, namely Leigh Woods. R. I. Pocock, in the *Zoologist*, 1897, p. 507, refers to having trapped it "night after night in numbers" in Somerset, amongst other counties, and one or more specimens taken by him at Pill-on-Avon are in the Natural History Museum. Other definite records are: Lympsham! (C. Tuckett); common there (F. H. L. Whish). Litton (B. W. T.). Ivythorn, near Street; two seen in the last two years (E. Page). Hardington Mandeville (A. Vassall). Porlock! common (E. W. Hendy). West Porlock (B. W. T.). Trapping at Chewton Mendip has so far failed to detect the species there.

**WATER VOLE.** *Arvicola amphibius* (Linn.).

One seen on July 14th, 1925, just above Chetsford Water bridge, Exmoor, at about 1350 feet (E. W. Hendy). Forrest records it only up to 800 or 1000 feet in Wales.

**LONG-TAILED FIELD MOUSE.** *Apodemus sylvaticus* (Linn.).

Several trapped in the writer's house at Chewton Mendip in the winter 1925-6. This species does occasionally enter dwelling-houses and rather a number of cases have been reported lately in the *Field* and elsewhere.

[The form or species called the YELLOW-NECKED or DE WINTON'S FIELD MOUSE—*Apodemus flavicollis* (Melchior)—has not yet been detected in Somerset. It is larger than the Common Field Mouse, of a brighter colour, and is stated to have generally a longer tail. The writer would be glad to receive any Field Mice apparently answering to this description for examination.]

BRITISH SQUIRREL. *Sciurus leucourus* (Kerr).

Always present in Hollowmarsh Wood and some other woods of the Chewton Mendip district, but now rarely seen in Chewton Mendip itself, where it was common in the grounds of the Priory and Chewton House twenty years ago. A very general and widespread decrease of squirrels appears to have taken place in recent years. Notes received from various correspondents allude to this: Seldom seen in the Bristol neighbourhood (C. Tuckett). Almost extinct at Backwell (A. R. Robinson). Formerly common in the Hardington Mandeville district near Yeovil, but none seen for six years (A. Vassall). Always to be seen in Butleigh Wood, near Street; very scarce for two years past, but numerous again in 1925 (E. Page). Very rarely seen in the Ilminster district; the same applies to Stoke and Bickenhall. There are a few in the Orchard Portman Woods. About forty years ago they were very numerous there, but since then their numbers have been greatly reduced on account of the damage they do to the plantations (W. H. Rendell). Unaccountably scarce in the Porlock district (N. G. Hadden). Deliberate destruction by keepers and others in some places on account of its bird's-nesting propensities and its destructiveness to trees may be in part responsible for the observed decrease, but it will not account for it entirely. A more exhaustive enquiry on this subject is projected.

POLECAT. *Putorius putorius* (Linn.).

A few appear still to linger in the wilder parts of the Mendip country. Keeper Brown, of Chewton Mendip, states that he trapped one in Hollowmarsh over forty years ago. Much more recently one was shot by Mr. Reece Uphill, of Greendown, a remote hamlet on the north side of Mendip above the Harptrees, after it had killed twenty-four of his fowls. This specimen,



lamentably stuffed, is in the possession of Mr. Uphill, who informed the writer in 1918 that it was killed not more than five or six years before.

Lord Waldegrave informs the writer that on August 11th, 1919, while waiting for pigeons in Eaker Hill Wood on Mendip he had an imperfect view of "a very dark animal of the stoat tribe," which might have been a Polecat, on a low wall "too far away to see very distinctly and too far to shoot." Though inconclusive, this record is of interest in conjunction with the Greendown one, the localities being not far distant from one another.

A more problematical incident occurred in July, 1916, when an animal having the appearance of a Polecat made its appearance in the shrubbery of Chewton House, Chewton Mendip, where it caused some consternation by its visitations to a large rat-trap, which on two or three occasions it apparently dragged for several yards in its efforts to secure the bait. It was seen in the dusk on two consecutive evenings by the writer, who waited in a tree in order to get a view of it. On the first occasion it was observed to enter the trap and take the bait, but in this instance the lid was found to be caught. The animal disappeared after being shot at and possibly wounded by the gardener. Although it may appear unlikely that an apparent Polecat in these circumstances would be a genuine wild animal rather than an escaped "Polecat ferret," the proximity of the Mendip country and the wandering propensities with which Polecats are credited should be taken into consideration before wholly rejecting the former possibility.

[PINE MARTEN. *Martes martes* (Linn.).

Another inconclusive but interesting record suggests that this species may still exist in the Exmoor district. An animal believed to be a Marten was seen by two members of the Ornithological Section on two separate occasions in the winter of 1924. Each time it was seen not far from Luckwell Bridge—between Wheddon Cross and Exford. On one occasion it was disturbed by hounds and on the other by a shooting party. It is quite suitable country for Martens and a few might exist there for years without being observed. Further

information of the occurrence of this species in Somerset or Devon is much to be desired. It is to be hoped that if the existence of the Pine Marten in West Somerset should be proved all possible precautions will be taken to preserve it, as it is now almost the rarest British Mammal. (Particulars communicated by N. G. Hadden.)]

OTTER. *Lutra lutra* (Linn.).

Particulars of occurrence and distribution in North Somerset and other parts of the county not regularly hunted over are desired. Charbonnier regarded it as "still fairly common on the Bristol Avon and the Axe" in 1909 and it was stated some years ago to occur sometimes on the Yeo at Compton Martin. For the Chewton Mendip district the writer has only one record, and that an old one, an Otter having visited Litton Reservoir on at any rate one occasion many years ago. A very large old dog otter was killed by the Mendip Foxhounds in Asham Wood, near Frome, in 1922. This animal must have been on the move, as it could not have had any means of subsistence in the wood.