



GROUPS

Examples from left to right: Harvest mouse (*Micromys minutus*) David Smith, Wood mouse (*Apodemus sylvaticus*) Norman Crowson, Water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) Norman Crowson, Bank vole (*Myodes glareolus*) Norman Crowson

Small mammals

Information: David Beattie

All about small mammals

- Possibly our most elusive taxonomic group due their size and behaviour.
- There are three groups of small mammals plus one individual. Note, there are some other species of mice and voles not listed, but all are quite rare.
- **Mice:** House mouse (*Mus musculus*), wood mouse (*Apodemus sylvaticus*), yellow necked mouse (*Apodemus flavicollis*), harvest mouse (*Micromys minutus*).
All are rodents (thus herbivores) but will sometimes eat small insects.
- **Shrews:** Common shrew (*Sorex araneus*), pygmy shrew (*Sorex minutus*), water shrew (*Neomys fodiens*).
Carnivores with a long-pointed snout and sharp spike like teeth. Mainly eat invertebrates.
- **Voles:** Field vole (*Microtus agrestis*), bank vole (*Myodes glareolus*), water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*).
Plump rodents with blunt muzzle, small eyes and ears and relatively short tail. Important prey species for birds of prey and other mammals e.g., stoats.
- **Hazel dormouse:** (*Muscardinus avellanarius*).
Found mainly in the south and west of the UK, in a line from the Wirral to Essex, though there is a population in Cumbria.
Living as they do in the tree canopy and hibernating for up to seven months; hazel dormice are probably the most elusive species. Their hibernation lasts from October to May.

Why do small mammals need our help?

Many are in decline due to habitat loss or degradation from development, pesticide use, modern methods of farming and domestic cat predation. The water vole also has suffered from predation by mink, although some species do have a stable population which is at its highest in autumn.

DID YOU KNOW? Hazel dormice are the only small mammal that truly hibernate. The other mammals that hibernate are hedgehogs and bats.

Water shrews have a venomous bite that can cause pain in humans but death to other small mammals!

How can we help?

- Have a wild area in your garden. Some people ensure this contains bramble which acts to protect the small mammals from a variety of predators.
- If you do have a cat, try to keep it in at night as many animal lovers do. If that proves difficult, use a small bell on a collar round the cat's neck.
- Encourage your local council to keep the grass verges wild or take part in 'No Mow May'.

Learn more

- Book: Britain's Mammals, Dominic Cousins et al, Princeton University Press, 2017.
- The NHBS Guide to UK Small Mammal Identification nhbs.com/blog/uk-small-mammal-identification
- The Mammal Society – For Evidence Based Conservation – For Evidence Based Conservation mammal.org.uk/
- People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) ptes.org
- Contact an A Rocha UK naturalist at naturalist@arocha.org