

CHURCHYARDS AND MAMMALS

Churches and churchyards can provide a good habitat for small mammals, and some of the larger and more unusual mammals will visit occasionally.

There are over 60 species of terrestrial mammals in Great Britain. Which of these species are seen in churchyards depends on the habitat in terms of food, shelter and the surrounding landscape. Usually churchyards have a lot of worms, grass, sometimes unmanaged, mature trees, bushes and hedgerows. Therefore, the mammal species found use these resources.

Moles and badgers feed on worms; mice, voles and shrews feed on vegetation and insects in the grassland. Hedgehogs and rabbits live in hedges and banks on the boundaries. Foxes, weasels, stoats and polecats are predators which eat all the other animals! Rarer species such as water voles would only be found where there is a watercourse or pond next door, but watch out for dormice which may be found in hedges or scrub, not just woodland!

What Attracts Mammals To Churchyards?

Resting or nesting sites: as churchyards are usually quiet and undisturbed, they can provide ideal habitats for wild animals.

Hedgerows and Walls

Many of the smaller species of mammals such as mice, voles, and hedgehogs make their homes in either holes in the ground or in above ground cavities in dense vegetation. A mature boundary hedgerow with branches, dead leaves and wildflowers at the base is a very valuable habitat that need not be disturbed by hedge trimming.



Dry-stone walls, are better than mortared walls for providing crevices often used by voles and weasels.

Buried in dense tussocky grass, which might only be mowed once a year, will be hidden a network of pathways, with characteristic feeding remains, woven grass nests and latrines of field vole.

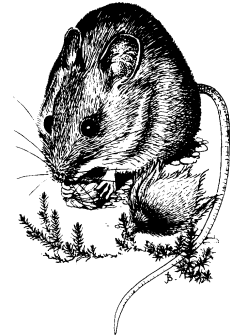
Trees and shrubs

Squirrels make their dreys in mature trees, and may take over hollows left by woodpeckers. Bats may also live in dead branches and behind dense ivy growth.

....and food!

Britain's mammals can be herbivores, insectivores or carnivores or a mixture of all three!

A variety of food sources throughout a year can be the key to their survival. Plant food from roots and grass, to flowers, nuts, seeds and berries are all used by different animals. A variety of invertebrates from tiny midges or soil beetles to worms and snails are all food....and the more small mammals the more food for the predators.



How To Improve A Churchyard For Mammals

Provide and protect resting sites

Develop a variety of habitats including hedgerows, shrubs, and long, tussocky grass around the churchyard, which are not disturbed or managed more than once a year.

Compost heaps or dead wood habitat piles can increase the places mammals can hide in.

Do not burn twigs, branches or clippings unless absolutely necessary, and always create a new fire pile rather than burning an existing heap as a hedgehog might be hiding under it.

Food

Trees and Shrubs: A variety of age of fruit and nut bearing trees and shrubs will improve resources for a variety of mammals, helping them to survive the winter.

Hedges: mixed native species hedges which are either left unmanaged or trimmed to at least 2 m, in rotation every 2-3 years are preferred as natural flowering and fruiting will attract insects, (and provide good bird habitat).

Wildflowers and grassland: an area of meadow in a churchyard, where the grass is left to grow longer for part of the year and wildflowers can set seed is important for insects and small mammals, upon which owls and larger mammals depend.

If this is not possible, leaving a strip of longer grassland around the boundary of the churchyard, adjacent to a hedge or wall, or around a shrubbery will be beneficial.

How To Find Mammals

Visit a churchyard at dawn or dusk, and quietly sit and watch what is around. Become a mammal detective, the animal is rarely seen but they leave behind evidence in the form of droppings, feeding remains, footprints, hairs, or holes.

To learn more about these contact your local Mammal Group or the Mammal Society.

Live trapping of small mammals is a good way to see the animals and find out what is there, but should only be done by an experienced person.

Some species are protected by law and the use of trapping or poisoned bait to catch nuisance species should not be done as it might affect non-target species.

All records should be sent in to the Local Biological Records Centre.

Problems With Mammals

Some species of mammals can cause problems in a churchyard if the populations become large, or they are living in an inconvenient place.

The Mammal Society provides free information and advice on dealing with squirrels, foxes, moles, mice and cats.

Further Information

THE MAMMAL SOCIETY www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal
Advice and Information sheets on all mammals.
Contacts for local mammal groups.
3 The Carronades, New Road, Southampton SO14
0AA, 02380 237874
enquiries@mammal.org.uk

People's Trust For Endangered Species
15 Cloisters House, 8 Battersea Park Road, London
SW8 4BG, 020 74984533 www.ptes.org.uk,
enquiries@ptes.org

The British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS)
Hedgehog House, Dhustone, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8
3PL 01584 890801 www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk
info@britishhedgehogs.org.uk (Important: Please note
if you are emailing about a hedgehog that may be
injured, ill or orphaned please call on 01584 890 801
instead as emails may not be seen in time).

Tracking Mammals Partnership

Surveys and monitoring in UK
www.trackingmammals.org.uk

Badger Groups UK

www.badger-groups.org.uk

