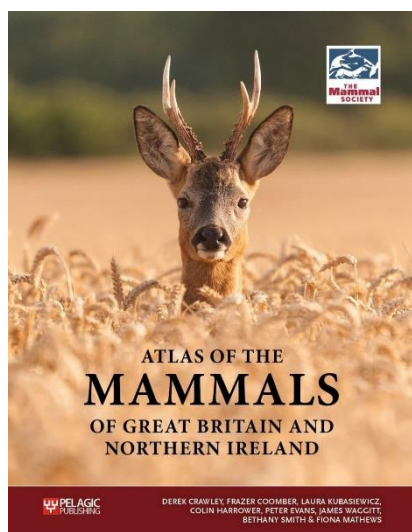


Book review: Atlas of the Mammals of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Pelagic Publishing, hardback, 192pp, £34.99)



This Atlas covers all terrestrial mammals and cetaceans recorded in or around the UK and draws on a huge dataset collated from the NBN Atlas, Local Environmental Record Centres, species recording schemes (including the NBMP) and many other organisations and individuals. Record sample sizes are impressive for terrestrial mammals and cetaceans alike, with the latter largely represented by records from the Sea Watch Foundation, bolstered by extensive datasets from many other key recording schemes.

Each species gets a two-page spread, comprising a photo displaying key identification features; concise text written by an expert on the species, covering distribution, ecology and identification; and a full page distribution map showing records at 10km resolution (hectads). The map symbols enable a clear comparison to be made between a historic period (1960-92 – the time frame of the 1993 mammal atlas compiled by Arnold) and the current time period (2000-16) (different historic periods are used for cetaceans and a few terrestrial species which have shown more rapid changes in distribution). Three symbols are used to indicate the following categories: hectads with occupancy recorded in the historic period only, hectads with occupancy recorded in both periods, and hectads with occupancy recorded within the current time period only.

The maps show distribution of available verified records rather than modelled range, in order to reflect actual confirmed presence. This means that, as acknowledged in the Methods chapter, there are some gaps in coverage for some species, particularly in areas with lower recording effort: as is commonly the case with species distribution maps they can reflect the distribution of recorders as well as of the species being recorded.

For each species with a high number of records, a bar chart helpfully shows the monthly distribution of records throughout the year, though these can either reflect seasonal changes in species presence (e.g. a huge spike in records in September for *Nathusius' pipistrelle*) or the timing of survey methods that produce the highest number of verified records (e.g. Jan/Feb hibernation surveys for Natterer's bat).

The maps paint a striking picture of changes in known distribution for species showing range expansion (e.g. pine marten in Scotland) and contraction (e.g. red squirrel), plus the return of species long extinct in the UK (wild boar and Eurasian beaver). A summary table provides a helpful overview of changes in the number of records and occupied hectads for each terrestrial species between the two recording periods. The majority of species show increases, though the authors note that it can be difficult to tell whether this reflects changes in observer effort, increases in recording technology and better species identification (both particularly relevant to bats), or actual changes in distribution. Declines are likely to be easier to interpret and this category includes species with well-known range contractions such as red squirrel, wild cat, water vole and harvest mouse.

Due to the extensive pulling together of a wide range of datasets, probably the vast majority of readers who have submitted a mammal record at some point between 2000 and 2016 (or within one of the historic periods covered) should have their efforts represented by one or more dots on the

maps. This is certainly true of National Bat Monitoring Programme volunteers, and given that even our most commonly encountered bat species, common and soprano pipistrelle, have gaps on the maps in areas where they doubtless occur, it is possible that a record you have submitted has made a crucial difference in enabling species presence to be confirmed in that 10km square (particularly in the less obviously “batty” areas which might otherwise be overlooked).

The maps may well inspire readers to go out recording in areas where species could be under-recorded. For example, the map for Leisler’s bat shows quite a sparse distribution, including 40+ hectads with records between 1960-1992 only, and considerably more with records between 2000-2016 only, the two categories often occurring in adjacent 10km squares, surely an incentive to head to areas lacking recent records armed with a full spectrum bat detector (and of course the knowledge of how to separate Leisler’s bat calls from noctule and serotine, or the contact details of an expert verifier!).

One thing that might frustrate readers is trying to work out which records occur in their county, since county boundaries are not shown on the maps. Possibly overlaying the symbols on county boundaries would have made the maps a bit too cluttered, in which case the inclusion of country and regional boundaries might have been a useful compromise.

This Atlas complements the 2018 publication “A Review of the Population and Conservation Status of British Mammals” (free to download [here](#)); together they represent a long-awaited and much-needed update on the status of the UK’s mammals and a valuable reference for anyone involved in their recording and/or conservation.

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