



MAMMALS

England's countryside and wildlife are under enormous pressures from intensive agriculture, demand for more housing, and increasing road traffic. With sensitive, well-timed management, quieter places like the Hurst Trust meadows can provide an essential haven for our surviving native animals.

However, as the countryside becomes more and more fragmented by growing towns and villages and a web of increasingly dangerous-to-cross roads, small reserves on their own cannot support sustainable populations of terrestrial animals. They become prone to starvation, disease or inbreeding and lack of replacement from outside. It's essential that our three small meadows form part of a larger wildlife corridor allowing all kinds of fauna and flora to spread and mix as part of larger populations. This is part of the rationale for the Trust adding both Overy Mead Piece and Old Bridge Meadow to its earlier purchase of the Hurst. We are also fortunate in having our friends the Earth Trust and their River of Life project just across the Thames. The River Thames Conservation Trust carries out further good conservation work upstream.

What can you see?

Visiting the meadows in daytime one might think there are few animals present, just rabbits and an occasional grey squirrel or muntjac deer (all non-native species, introduced by man). However, most wildlife has adapted to keep well hidden from humans and their dogs, and there are two secret worlds around us here:

The first is hidden in the longer grass and denser undergrowth where there are good populations of bank voles, field voles, common shrews, pygmy shrews, wood mice and the weasels that hunt them. We know this from live capture (and release) traps and trailcam filming. Moles too are often overlooked but their molehills reveal their constant activity underground in all three meadows, despite seasonal flooding. We've also found grass snakes, common toads and common frogs throughout the areas of rougher vegetation.

At night, another secret world appears. Trailcamming has filmed foxes, more muntjac, brown rats, American mink and the occasional badger visit. After declining for decades due to persecution and poisoning from DDT, otters have returned to the River Thames, and are now regular night-time visitors to the Thame as well. Several species of bat emerge on warmer nights, with Pipistrelles and daubenton's Bats often seen hunting for flying insects.

(Click on the binocular icons to get a visual guide to each type of mammal.)

rabbit



muntjac Deer



bank vole



field vole



common shrew



wood mouse



weasel



brown rat



grey squirrel



badger

