



# 2012 Mammal Report

John Young, KMG Mammal Recorder

## 2012 Dormice Report by Hazel Ryan

We had an unusual start to the year with a dormouse caught by a cat in Petham in January. The exceptionally mild weather probably caused him to wake early as he should not have emerged from hibernation until around April or May.

In June, when dormice would normally be actively replacing lost weight from hibernation and beginning to look for mates, the weather turned wet and windy. Dormice have very fine fur which is easily waterlogged and so prefer not to forage in heavy rain. Instead they were found torpid in nest boxes in June and July, much later than usual. Many had not even built a nest. This seems to have delayed breeding with very few litters found early in the season. A litter in Canterbury was abandoned in August, possibly due to the adults' inability to find enough food. One adult male, who was marked by fur clipping, lost weight between the June and July checks. It would have been expected that he would put weight on as the season progresses.

The numbers of dormice found in nest boxes at many monitoring sites were much lower than average although there was an increase in the autumn. Juveniles appeared in boxes in the autumn at some sites despite no or few young litters being found earlier. Those that were found in autumn reached good pre hibernation weights but this could be a reflection of them having saved energy by not breeding.

Other areas of the country reported similar low numbers and poor breeding including Surrey, the Isle of Wight and as far afield as Flanders!

Numbers of dormice found in nest boxes always varies widely between sites. It is probably influenced by a range of factors such as habitat, tree and shrub species present, age of coppice, aspect, numbers and position of boxes, condition of boxes and availability of natural nest sites. We won't really know the true picture of how dormice fared in 2012 until the data sent into the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme has been analysed.

## 2012 Seal Report by Jon Bramley Kent, SeaWatch Co-ordinator & Bramley Associates

2012 was a busy year for recording seals. Bramley Associates along with SeaWatch and others carried out two plane surveys of offshore sandbanks, a number of boat surveys and a one year study of a haul out site near Pegwell Bay.

A satellite tagging project was also carried out on a number of common seals (*Phoca vitulina*) hauled out near Southend and off of Margate.

Results show that common seals are widely distributed and are found hauled out on many sandbars off of the Kent coast and in the Thames Estuary, with greys (*Halichoerus grypus*) favouring hauling out on the Goodwins. Numbers of seals hauling out at any one time though was found to significantly vary over the year (one haul out site varied from having no seals hauling out to over 50 animals depending upon the season). Some animals also appear to show rather high fidelity to haul out areas, while others range further, which may be an age dependant relationship that is still to be explored.

## 2012 Cetaceans Report by John Young

### Bottle-nosed Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus*

3 were seen off Dungeness on the 9<sup>th</sup> March.

### White-beaked Dolphin *Lagenorhynchus albirostris*

An incredible year of sightings for this species in Kent waters. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> March a single dolphin was found dead (stranded) on a beach near Margate. On the 7<sup>th</sup> April, at least 9 were seen trailing behind a couple of boats at Dungeness, with 8 still present on the 12<sup>th</sup>. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> May a single was found dead on a beach at Whitstable, the post mortem suggested that the animal was elderly given the state of its teeth. Also on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May ten were reported from a fishing boat out of Margate.

It is too early to say quite why this species has become more frequent around both the north eastern and south western Kent coastline but this might indicate a seasonal movement of animals between the North Sea and English Channel/Atlantic.

### Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*

Peak monthly counts:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Bockhill	1	-	2	2	5	5	2	1	1	1	1	-
Samphire Hoe	-	-	3	2	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dungeness	1	2	10	14	22	39	20	26	11	6	4	2

The count of 39 in June at Dungeness is the highest ever recorded and quite unprecedented for Kent. The sustained presence of high numbers of this species from May through to August in that area potentially suggests an abundance of prey species. At the time reports from local fishing boats were of 'dolphins' everywhere!

Pleasingly records were received of 1 to 2 animals from all around the Kent coastline from Dungeness to Cliffe fort. 3 were off Abbotscliffe on 13<sup>th</sup> April and 6 off Copt Point on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September. Numbers of juveniles observed were very low, with records of singles seen at Dungeness and the Swale only.

Stranded (dead) animals were found at Lade, Coombe Bay, Shellness (Sheppey), Minnis Bay, Birchington and Ramsgate.

### **Unidentified Dolphin sp.**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2 unidentified dolphins were seen from Samphire Hoe. 3 were observed from Dungeness on the 13<sup>th</sup> April with 2 observed from Copt Point on the 17<sup>th</sup>.

Cetacea Record Contributors.

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