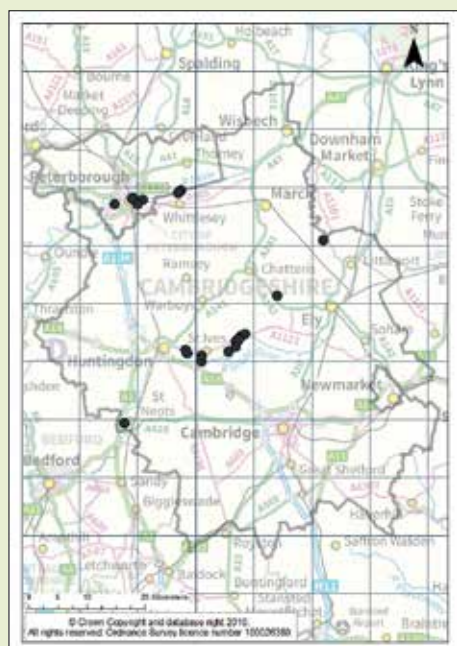


Mammal Atlas

The Secretive Seals of Cambridgeshire. *Freshwater Feeding and Inland Breeding.*

Mark Hows, mark@hows.org.uk

When seals are reported 50 miles inland they quite often get news coverage, however, landlocked Cambridgeshire has a small population of common seals which has largely gone unnoticed by the media and the nature community at large, that is until recently.



Common Seal Map. Cambridgeshire Mammal Group / Environment Agency

Seals have been seen regularly in Cambridgeshire's rivers for many years, easily negotiating the 45 miles through the locks of the Great Ouse into the heart of Cambridgeshire and beyond. But until the advent of the digital communication revolution they have largely gone unreported.

There is a significantly larger number of birdwatchers than there are mammal watchers, they regularly patrol Cambridgeshire's waterways and interesting

mammals such as otters and seals are often reported alongside the avian sightings. This has allowed a picture of the distribution of common seals in Cambridgeshire to be understood. With a cluster in the River Nene and associated waterways near Peterborough and another near St Ives on the Great Ouse and adjacent waterways, both rivers flow into the Wash and this has been shown to be the origin of common seals in Cambridgeshire, with several flipper tagged individuals from the Wash being recorded in Cambridgeshire.



Flipper Tag.
Mark Hows

Digital photography has also been a valuable tool, allowing identification of individuals and monitoring their movements. This has shown that some individuals are actually resident in the river and are not just lost or roaming individuals as once thought. One pair has been in the St Ives area for two years and one individual near Needingworth has also been present for a similar length of time.

This raises the question if there are resident seals, all be it in small numbers, are they breeding? Mating activity has been



Mating seals. Kevin Loader



Mother with pup. Robert Burton

witnessed and photographed and there have been a number of reports of pups and breeding over the last few years. Breeding has been hard to confirm as the pups can swim within a few hours of birth and suckling mothers are elusive, but when a mother suckling a pup was photographed in 2014 breeding in Cambridgeshire was confirmed for the first time.

What does the future hold for Cambridgeshire's seals? With a small population of breeding resident seals and a regular influx of transient seals they are probably going to become a more regular sight on Cambridgeshire's waterways over the next few years.



Common Seal. Mark Hows

Living in Dorset, holidaying in Dorset or just passing through? **Dorset Mammal Atlas**

The Dorset Mammal Group and the Dorset Environmental Records Centre are currently working on a mammal atlas for the county and would welcome records from any Mammal Society members visiting Dorset. Records of all species are welcome and should ideally be submitted via the Dorset Mammal Group recording

form at www.dorsetmammalgroup.wordpress.com/mammal-recording-form.

Alternatively please send any records to records@dorsetmammalgroup.org.uk. If submitting records via email please include the species name, date, location (ideally with a grid reference), numbers and nature of record, e.g. sighting, road casualty or other

field signs seen. It would also be helpful to know how certain you are about the record using the classifications of Certain or Probable (most likely to be used for difficult groups like Polecat/Polecat-ferret, yellow-necked mouse, shrews seen briefly etc.)

Richard Webb, Dorset Mammal Recorder