

Hampshire - A Day with Small Mammals

Naturetrek Tour Report

12th September 2025



Short-tailed Field Vole



Wood Mouse



Yellow-necked Mouse



Inspecting a Wood Mouse

Tour report by Ben Chapple



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Jim Andrews (leader) with eight Naturetrek clients

The morning began at the Bartons Mill pub in Old Basing, where we met Jim, who gave us a short introduction to the day's plan of action. Given the previous night's heavy rain, we were warned that many of the Millfield Reserve's small mammals might have ignored the traps and sought higher ground, but we were nevertheless optimistic of finding a good variety of rodents during the course of our excursion. As we approached the first of the numerous Longworth traps set by Jim, both Sparrowhawk and Red Kite soared overhead, and a Green Woodpecker called from a nearby copse. The (at least for now!) sunny weather had even encouraged a Chiffchaff to sing; it was audible in the middle distance.

As we walked, Jim pointed out the massive growths of Dogwood, and described the intensity of the work required to keep it from completely taking over the open grassland areas of the reserve. He also explained the habitat preferences of our biggest target species, the Hazel Dormouse, and how similar these were to those of bats (perhaps a surprise, given their vastly different dietary requirements!). Both animals thrive in landscapes of interconnected woods and hedgerows, which are sadly all too rare these days. These bushes were full of feeding Blackcaps, stocking up for their upcoming migration.

The first couple of traps were empty, but it wasn't long before we set eyes on our first small mammal of the day: a female Wood Mouse. Although this is a common garden species in many parts of the country, it was wonderful to get such intimate, close views inside Jim's transparent plastic box. We then moved on to check underneath several reptile mats. None of the Grass Snakes that Jim often sees were on show today, but the first mat produced a brief view of a Bank Vole, which had built a nest under its shade. Although just a few of us glimpsed the animal, it was nonetheless fascinating to see the material from which the vole had made its bedding, which included an old snake skin! Happily, the very next reptile mat had two further Bank Voles beneath it, enabling everyone in the group to appreciate their rich, russet coats.

Moving to the open fields and floodplain area of the reserve, we came across a Rush Veneer moth, and a Small Copper butterfly. Jim was doubtful that the traps set here, on what was now waterlogged, muddy soil, would contain anything at all, but strangely enough this was our most productive area of the day. Here we discovered two further Wood Mice, two baby Bank Voles, and a single Short-tailed Field Vole, whose stubby appendage and considerably duller coat helped to distinguish it from its close relative.

With great anticipation, we then moved on to the woodland area of the reserve, where we would be checking a number of boxes and tubes set up as potential nest sites for Hazel Dormice. The first few boxes checked looked promising, with plenty of evidence of recent activity; the only thing missing was the animal itself! A similar story was repeated for the rest of the morning, but as we knew there would be more boxes to check in the afternoon, and we returned to the pub for lunch with spirits high.

Lunch was an exceptional spread of sandwiches, chips and soup, accompanied by a short talk from Jim on all the different small mammal species present within the reserve. After some necessary digestion time, we ventured back out, somewhat nervously as the morning's clear sunny skies had been replaced by ominous black clouds. At first, we strolled along a gloriously clear chalk stream, watching Brown Trout flitting across the pebbles. There was also an unusual Mallard which, with clean white flanks and a purplish sheen on its head, looked rather like it had some

Tufted Duck in it! We walked as far as Basing House Old Barn, where Jim pointed out what remained of a Wall Bedstraw plant, a rare species for which the site is well-known.

We then retraced some of our steps from the morning, in case any of the traps had become reoccupied. The most frustrating miss of the day came when Jim picked up a seemingly empty trap, only to watch as a Pygmy Shrew erupted from the entrance tunnel and disappeared into the tangled grass. If we had arrived a minute or so later, he thought, it would almost certainly have set off the trap. This was a shame, but that's the way things are with nature sometimes!

We spent the rest of the afternoon checking the remaining boxes and tubes, grateful that the tree cover provided some shelter from occasionally torrential rain. One of the boxes did contain a young Yellow-necked Mouse, the first that Jim had found all year. Although very similar to its congener, the Wood Mouse, this juvenile was beginning to develop the diagnostic golden markings that give it its name. However, after a couple of hours we reached the last of the boxes without any Hazel Dormice to show for our (and particularly Jim's) efforts. Despite not finding their occupants, we had discovered at least eight recent nests, which provided clear evidence that the species is still doing well here. We all agreed that this knowledge, and our sightings of no fewer than four other species of rodent, were excellent compensation for the dormouse's elusiveness. Finally, we returned to the Bartons Mill pub, where we thanked Jim for a superb day out and said our goodbyes.

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Species lists

Mammals

		Sept 2025
Common name	Scientific name	12
Wood Mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>	3
Yellow-necked Mouse	<i>Apodemus flavicollis</i>	1
Bank Vole	<i>Myodes glareolus</i>	5
Short-tailed Field Vole	<i>Microtus agrestis</i>	1

Birds

Common name	Scientific name
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>