

Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve

The Mammals (excl. Bats) of Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve Updated February 2024



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Manor Woods Valley Group



1. Introduction and Methodology

Manor Woods Valley Group member, Peter Loy-Hancocks, made his own observations and collated reports and records of mammal in Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve. Sources of reports and records included the author's own observations, a Manor Woods Valley Group volunteers related WhatsApp group, Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC) open access records, iNaturalist and iRecord online recording records, the National Biodiversity Network atlas (NBN) and reports on local Facebook sites.

For the purpose of this report records referred to as 'recent' cover the period 2017 to 2024.

The bats of Manor Woods Valley are considered in a separate report.

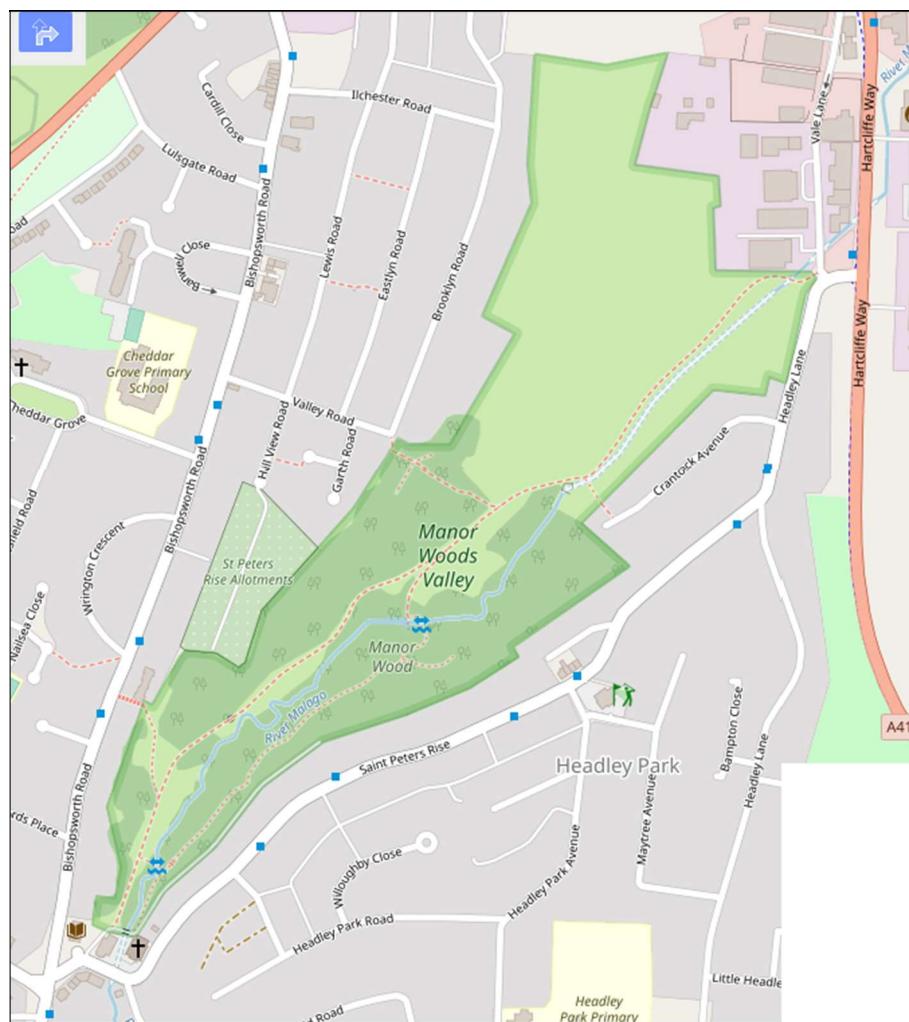


Figure 1: Manor Woods Valley

2. Records and Reports

There have been recent sightings and/or records of Common and Pygmy Shrews, Rabbits, Grey Squirrels, Bank Voles, Wood Mice, Harvest Mouse, House Mouse,

Brown Rats, Red Foxes, Badgers, Otters, Weasels and Roe Deer in, and in the immediate vicinity of, Manor Woods Valley. Hedgehogs and Wood Mice have been recorded less recently.

3. Discussion

Britain has 28 native terrestrial mammal species, excluding bats, that arrived before the formation of the English Channel. Previously extinct in the wild, the Beaver has been reintroduced into Scotland and England in the last twenty years. The Wild Boar, also previously extinct, has been the subject of several illegal releases over recent years. There are seven species that, although introduced by human activities, are considered naturalised and have formed part of Britain's fauna since at least Roman times. The remaining seven species are more recent introductions. Some of these species have specific habitat requirements or limited geographical distributions, and thereby would not be expected to occur in the Bristol area.

Twenty native mammal species have been recorded in the wider Bristol region, namely Hedgehogs, Moles, Common, Pygmy and Water Shrews, Hazel Dormice, Bank, Field and Water Voles, Harvest, Wood, Yellow-necked and House Mice, Foxes, Badgers, Otters, Stoats, Weasels, Polecats and Roe Deer.

Beavers have recently been seen on the New Cut. These are no doubt individuals that are dispersing from the population that is known to exist near Bath.

Five introduced species occur in the Bristol area; Rabbit, Grey Squirrel, Brown/Common Rat, American Mink and Reeves' Muntjac.

Eulipotyphla (Insectivores)

Hedgehogs have been recorded occasionally. They are likely to occur throughout Manor Woods Valley.

Common and Pygmy Shrews are occasionally encountered as dead bodies on paths. They are often killed by mammalian predators, but are distasteful and so rarely actually eaten. Calls of both of these species have been recorded during the 2022 bat survey of gardens immediately adjacent to the site. Both species are likely to be common throughout Manor Woods Valley.

Although not recorded or reported, it is possible that Water Shrews occur on the site.

Lagomorpha (Rabbits and hares)

Rabbits were frequently seen in the 2000's, but numbers appeared to have declined as dense Bramble scrub encroached on the Rabbit Field and Manor Woods Orchard. With the clearance of Brambles in the late 2010's Rabbits returned, with occasional sighting made in the Orchard with damage occurring to newly planted fruit trees there.



Rabbit in Manor Woods Orchard

Rodentia (Rodents)

Grey Squirrels are the most often encountered wild mammal in Manor Woods Valley. They are seen on almost every walk through the site. They reach their highest numbers in the autumn; at which time they are at their most obvious whilst gathering Hazel nuts and acorns, and burying them in the woodlands or on the edges of the grassland areas. Their dreys (nest of leaves and twigs) can frequently be seen in the forks of branches of larger trees, especially in Old Manor Wood.

Grey Squirrels can have two litters, of 3-4 kits each, a year. Mortality is high, such that up to 85% perish by the end of their first winter, reducing to between 30 and 50% during the second year. In particularly good mast (nut and berry production) years, however, almost all adults and half of the juveniles may survive the year. Squirrels were recorded in Manor Woods Valley during a bird survey conducted over the winter of 2022-3. The steady decline in sightings over the winter period is in line with a high winter mortality over this period (see table 1)

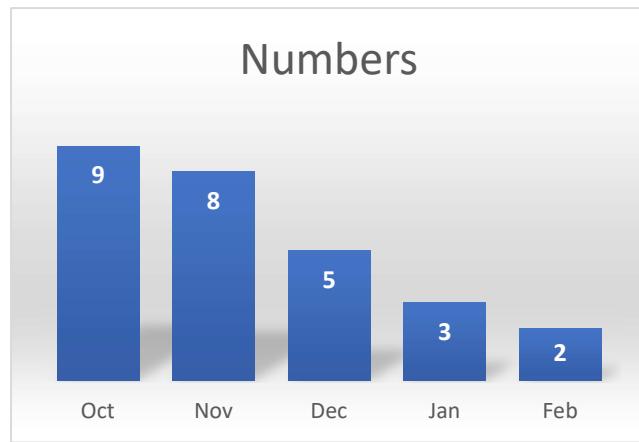


Table 1: Grey Squirrels numbers 2022-3

Bank Voles are often encountered under reptile survey mats placed across the site. A number of Wood Mice were caught (and released) during a live-trapping survey conducted in Manor Woods Valley in 2009. Both of these rodents are usually abundant in deciduous woodland, and are therefore likely to be occur and be common throughout Manor Woods Valley's woodlands. Although not recorded or reported Yellow-necked Mice could occur.

Due to changes in habitats, Harvest Mice are probably in decline in the UK. They have recently been recorded at Yew Tree Farm off Bridgewater Road. During the winter of 2023-4, three Harvest Mouse nests were found in tussocky grassland adjacent to Manor Woods Orchard.



Harvest Mouse nest in Orchard Triangle

The ultrasonic call of a House Mouse was picked-up in an adjacent garden during the bat survey of 2022.

Brown Rats occur throughout the site. They have been seen eating fallen apples near to the interceptor and on the banks of the Malago near to the St Peters Rise entrance. Their burrows occur in Manor Woods Orchard. During the bat survey of 2022, the ultrasonic calls of Brown Rats were recorded in several gardens bordering the site, sometimes in large numbers.

There is much Hazel in the woodlands of Manor Woods Valley. This might be taken to mean that Hazel Dormice could occur. Unfortunately, this is unlikely to be the case. Hazel Dormice are reasonably widely recorded in North Somerset and are present in Leigh Woods, 4km to the northwest of the site. However, they occur at very much lower population densities than the other small woodland mammals, Wood Mice and Bank Voles, that are on-site. This means that there is unlikely to be enough suitable habitat to support a viable Dormouse population in the long-term. In the event of local extinction there are no 'Hazel Dormouse friendly' corridors or connections between Manor Woods Valley and sites where this species is known to occur.

Carnivora (Carnivores)

Foxes are occasionally seen on the site and in neighbouring gardens, often in broad daylight. They are most often encountered near to, or in, the Rabbit Field and at the opposite end of the site, near to the St Peters Rise entrance. Two were seen together in this latter location in January 2023. Foxes are often mentioned on social media sites by home-owners living in close proximity to Manor Woods Valley. Fox noises and their footwear-stealing habits in particular are mentioned. Due to the presence of so many dogs in Manor Woods Valley, it is likely that Foxes using the site have their earths (dens) in local gardens rather than on it. These are typically under garden sheds.

Badgers occur in Manor Woods Valley and are often seen in gardens bordering the site. In April 2023 a cyclist saw a Badger crossing the main path near the St Peters Rise entrance at c5:30am.

After many years of absence, Otters are now well established on local watercourses. Signs (spraint) of Otters were first noted in the Pigeonhouse Stream adjacent to Hartcliffe Way in 2019 and again in January 2022. Otters were run-over on Hartcliffe Way in November 2021, January 2023 and February 2024.

In the winter of 2019/20, an Otter was filmed hunting ornamental fish in a pond in a garden that backs on to the Malago, immediately off the upstream end of Manor Woods Valley. This individual can only have reached this pond by travelling up the Malago and traversing the open space at the northeast end of the site. Another Otter was filmed dragging a large Koi Carp across a garden, backing onto Manor Woods Valley near to the St Peters Rise entrance, approximately 30m from the Malago during the summer of 2022 and again twice in 2023. An Otter was reported as having been seen in the Pigeonhouse Stream, in neighboring Crox Bottom, in November 2023.



Otter in garden adjacent to Manor Woods Valley

A Weasel was seen on several occasions, at different places within the site, during the summer of 2021. These sightings may well be of different individuals. The presence

of what appears to be a population of Weasels indicates that there is an ample supply of the small mammals, including Wood Mice and Bank Voles, on which they prey. Although not recorded or reported, it is possible that Stoats occur in Manor Woods Valley.

American Mink may have occurred along the Malago as they swept across the country following their introduction in the 1950's and 60's, but are now thought to be absent. The current absence of Water Voles from the site is likely to be as a result of Mink predation as they swept through the area.

Polecats have spread to areas surrounding Bristol and may find their way to Manor Woods Valley in the future. Local social media sites occasionally report sightings of their domesticated relatives, Ferrets. If not caught-up by their owners, can establish feral populations.

Artiodactyla (Even-toed ungulates)

Once a widespread native animal, Roe Deer only survived in remote parts of Scotland by 1700. The current English and Welsh populations are derived from reintroductions from the Continent. Roe Deer are still spreading across the latter two home countries and reached the Bristol area some years ago. Their appearance in Manor Woods Valley has been long expected. They have commonly been seen on Bedminster Down over the past few years and during the quiet days of 'lock-down' in 2020, at least one was seen roaming the streets of Knowle West.

It took until summer 2022 for a doe (female) Roe Deer to appear in Manor Woods Valley. She was first seen on the edge of Valley Heights Meadow, then immediately after was present in a garden near to the St Peters Rise site entrance. A deer, presumably the same one, was seen on Headley Lane and nearby locations in the proceeding few days. As Roe Deer continue to increase in numbers, it is very likely that this individual represented the vanguard of a population that is likely to establish itself in Manor Woods Valley.



Roe Deer in garden adjacent to Manor Woods Valley

Reeves' Muntjac are still increasing in numbers and distribution, and occur in Bristol, so could occur in Manor Woods Valley in the near future. This small, non-native, deer has been recorded in Bedminster, within 1km of the site.

4. Conclusions

Eleven of the twenty-five native and introduced terrestrial mammal species that occur in the Bristol area have been recorded and/or reported as being present in, or in the immediate vicinity of, Manor Woods Valley in the recent and slightly more distant past. An additional three species are likely to occur, but have not been recorded or reported.

Most of the mammals that are present are common and widespread. The records of Otters and Weasels, and, in this suburban setting, Rabbits, are notable.

Dedicated survey work for Water Shrews, Yellow-necked Mice and Stoats would help to determine if these species are present in Manor Woods Valley.

It is hoped that this report will encourage members of the public to report sighting of mammals in Manor Woods Valley.