

## Title: Harvest Mouse Training Event – 7<sup>th</sup> October 2014

Author: Becky Clews-Roberts, Mammals in a Sustainable Environment Project Officer, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) [rebecca.clews-roberts@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk](mailto:rebecca.clews-roberts@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk)

### Background

One of the objectives of the Mammals in a Sustainable Environment (MISE) Project is to raise awareness of some of our rarer mammals and provide volunteers and others involved in mammal conservation training in how to undertake surveys. One such example is the harvest mouse (*Micromys minutus*), a species for which we currently have less than 30 recent records across the whole of Wales.

With this in mind, on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2014, the Mammals in a Sustainable Environment (MISE) Project held a joint harvest mouse training event with North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT) at the Village Hall, Llanbedrgoch on the Isle of Anglesey. The event focussed on how to survey for harvest mice using the nest search technique.

### The event

The training course attracted 28 attendees who had been informed of the event via the usual MISE channels such as Facebook and email. The attendees included volunteers and biodiversity officers who lived locally and those who had travelled from further afield such as Denbighshire.

As people arrived they were greeted by MISE Project Officer Becky Clews-Roberts and NWWT Conservation Officers Ben Stammers and Chris Wynne. Refreshments were served and attendees had a chance to network, browse the display table and watch the live, captive-bred harvest mice that Chester Zoo had provided for the event.



Captive-bred harvest mice from Chester Zoo.  
Image: Ceri Morris



Attendees browsing displays.  
Image Becky Clews-Roberts

The morning session began with attendees introducing themselves, telling others what experience they had and what they wanted to achieve from the training session.

Becky Clews-Roberts then gave a 1-hour illustrated talk which included an introduction to the MISE Project followed by harvest mouse ecology, behaviour and survey techniques. Attendees were each given copies of two publications produced by the MISE project – “The Harvest Mouse – an Introduction to our Smallest Rodent” (see below for front cover) and the A5 postcard “Have you seen this mouse?” which is easier to take out into the field and illustrates what a harvest mouse looks like.

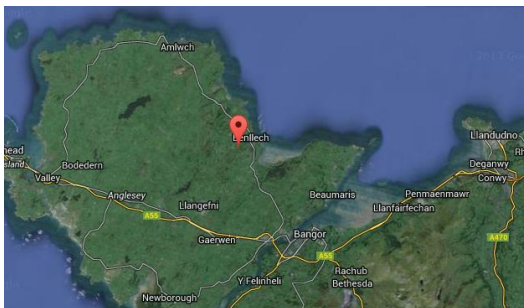


Front cover of MISE Publication



MISE Project Officer giving an illustrated talk. Image: Anthony Roberts

Chris Wynne from NWWT also gave a presentation where he described the site that we were going to survey – Cors Goch National Nature Reserve (NNR). The reserve lies 2 km inland of Benllech on the Isle of Anglesey as shown on the map below. It is an area of fen, grassland and heath with a range of wildflowers and animals. The area had been highlighted in the Cofnod report “Harvest Mice in Wales Where Might They Be?” as being suitable habitat in which to carry out surveys. Chris ended by advising attendees on health and safety matters.



Location of Cors Goch NNR

After a short car journey, we arrived at Cors Goch NNR where Chris and Ben from NWWT described the mixed habitats found at the site. They also showed attendees where the harvest mouse bait pot survey had taken place earlier in the summer. At the time of the event, results of the bait pot survey were not known but we now know that the droppings collected during the survey all proved negative for harvest mouse. There were however records of pygmy shrew which was not previously recorded at the site.

Becky Clews-Roberts reminded the attendees how to carry out the nest search as well as a how to do so safely. Then, all 28 volunteers lined up along the edge of the path that led into the grassy area and started to walk into it whilst scanning the grasses and tussocks for harvest mouse nests.





Volunteers carrying out harvest mouse nest search at Cors Goch NNR.  
Image: Becky Clews-Roberts

Sadly, no harvest mouse nests were found during the 2hour search but experts were able to help volunteers identify vole nests, pheasant droppings, moth pupae and describe the habitat.



Pheasant droppings  
Image: Becky Clews-Roberts

Volunteers were sufficiently trained to carry out their own nest searches in the future. In fact, one such volunteer did so just a week after this event and found two non-breeding harvest mouse nests at a site on the East coast of Anglesey, the nest found is shown below.



Non-breeding harvest mouse nest  
found by volunteer John Bratton  
following training event.  
Image: John Bratton

## Conclusions

Whilst this particular event did not find any evidence of harvest mice in Cors Goch, it provided volunteers with much needed training on how to go about such surveys. And, as already reported, one volunteer subsequently found harvest mouse nests at a site near Menai Bridge, only the second recent record of harvest mouse on Anglesey. Volunteers offered verbal positive feedback to the Project Officer after the event with several more saying that they hope to carry out nest searches.

A full report on all the harvest mouse work carried out by the MISE project in Wales is currently in preparation and will be available on the MISE website.