



Harvest Mouse

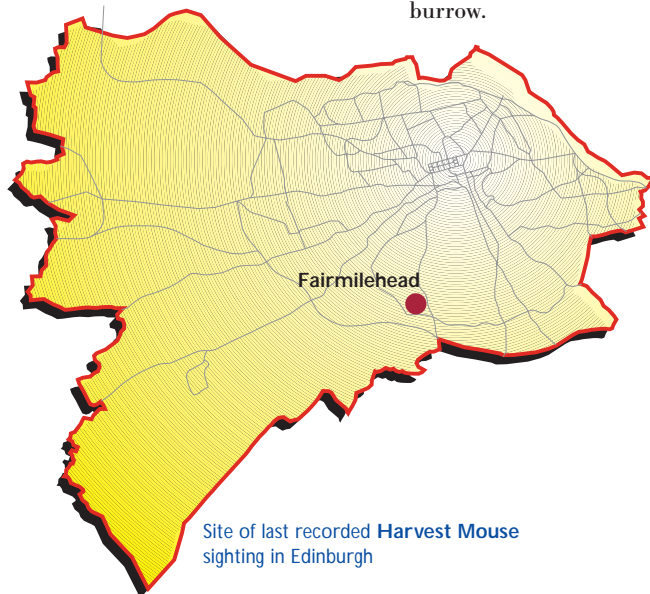
(Micromys minutus)

STATUS & ECOLOGY

The harvest mouse is in decline across the UK and there are few recorded sightings in Scotland. Although the species is believed to no longer exist in Edinburgh, in the near past it was present at Fairmilehead and remains have been identified in an owl pellet found beside Duddingston Loch. The last known population in Edinburgh was lost in the 1970s as a result of housing development.

Harvest mice live in long grass, dry reedbeds, ungrazed hay meadows and cereals, especially wheat. They are relative specialists of the ruderal stage with its abundant annual and perennial forbs and are absent from mid-successional habitat stages when small trees and shrubs are present. In summer, nests are formed from balls of shredded grass on grass stalks or brambles. In winter, the nests are larger, at ground level, and tend to be less spherical. Occasionally the harvest mouse will create an underground burrow.

The harvest mouse is largely nocturnal, feeding on grass seeds, fruit and berries, insects, and in spring when other food is scarce, green shoots. Home ranges vary between 0.04 and 0.06 hectares, although there can be considerable overlap between neighbouring ranges. Even though populations can be extensive, these animals are largely solitary. The young are weaned for 15 days and are chased from the vicinity of the nest if the mother is pregnant. There is no specific legislation protecting the harvest mouse.



*Wee, sleekit, cow'rin', tim'rous beastie,
O what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
Wi' bickering brattle!
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee
Wi' murd'ring pattle!*
Rabbie Burns

FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

Impacts

The significant loss of habitat to development and agricultural intensification has been the single largest reason for the loss of harvest mouse numbers. In urban areas, such as Edinburgh, continued absence from suitable habitats may be attributed to the effects of habitat fragmentation and isolation.

Threats

Habitat loss remains a concern, particularly given the continued expansion of the city into the surrounding greenbelt and wider countryside. Harvest mice seem to favour dry continental climates, and it has been suggested that their distribution in Britain is limited by summer rainfall. Heavy rain can lead to high juvenile mortality, and cold and wet are important climatic factors that terminate the breeding season. Thus climate change as a result of global warming could have a significant impact on numbers.

CURRENT ACTION

The location of the last recorded sighting of harvest mouse was re-surveyed in 1997 by the Mammal Society, but no positive sightings were made as the area had been developed.

ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

Objectives

To determine the status of harvest mouse in Edinburgh, conserve any local populations that may exist and consider their re-introduction to areas of suitable habitat.

Targets

To survey potential harvest mouse habitats across Edinburgh, protect areas with positive identifications and undertake a species re-introduction feasibility study.

Actions

Ascertain evidence for its historical distribution and confirm the current status of the harvest mouse in Edinburgh by undertaking a survey of appropriate habitat by Autumn 2000.

(Actioned by: Mammal Society)

Identify and protect from development any areas found to contain harvest mouse populations, by Summer 2001.

(Actioned by: City of Edinburgh Council City Development Department)

Undertake a feasibility study for the re-introduction of the harvest mouse by Winter 2001; ascertaining historical presence, addressing reasons for its loss and identifying suitable habitat.

(Actioned by: Mammal Society)

Key Contacts

Mammal Society
City of Edinburgh Council (City Development)

Peter Reynolds
David Jamieson

CHAMPIONS

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