

## 'Pop goes the weasel' !

*Mustela erminea* and *Mustela nivalis*

**Stoat and Weasel :** **Stoats** are small but highly effective predators, able to kill rabbits four times heavier than themselves. They also feed on rodents and ground nesting birds. They give birth to up to 14 kits raised in burrows or tree hollows.

**Weasels** live in woodland and clearings, in the vacated burrows of rodents. They feed primarily on mice and voles, and occasionally take rabbits and ground nesting birds.

Both animals are brown in colour with a white underside, the Stoat however, is a larger animal and has a black tip to it's tail. The tail is about half the total length of the animal's body.

Stoats and Weasels are rarely seen these days but observations by *Shotover Wildlife* have shown that they are well established on the hill. The decline of Stoats and Weasels on Shotover followed the 1950's crash in the rabbit population due to myxomatosis.

*Mustela putorius*

**Polecat:** In recent years sightings of polecat have become a little more regular. The Polecat is larger than both Stoat and Weasel, and is considerably darker in appearance, with a distinctive 'mask' on it's face. It has a similar diet. Following near extinction in the UK, it has become adapted to a more urban lifestyle.

*Oryctolagus cuniculus*

**Rabbit:** On Shotover, Rabbits are important grazers on the acid grassland. This keeps the competitive plants under control.

Rabbits often live in large underground colonies and emerge at dusk to feed on plants. Each female produces 4 -12 young, 4 - 7 times a year. The 1950's myxomatosis epidemic greatly reduced the Rabbit population and the animals that preyed on them. Foxes and stoats are now the main predator of Rabbits on Shotover.



*Meles meles*

**Badger:** Lives in woodland in deep tunnels, which it digs itself. The Badger is nocturnal, concealing itself by day. In the winter, it confines itself to its sett, in false hibernation. Badgers have regular foraging routes for feeding and have a varied diet of earthworms and other animal and plant food. There are several Badger setts around the hill.

*Vulpes vulpes*

**Fox:** Found in woodland, fields and increasingly in urban areas. It feeds on a variety of small mammals, birds and worms. The 'urban fox' will also raid rubbish bins. Foxes range over the whole hill, and *Shotover Wildlife* members have seen them using old badger sets for raising cubs.

*Erinaceus europaeus*

**Hedgehog:** Found in woods and gardens in undergrowth and scrub. It preys on a range of invertebrates, mainly worms and beetles. In recent years, there has been a national decline in this humble creature.

*Lepus europaeus*

**Brown Hare:** The Hare is twice the size of a rabbit and is easily recognised by its long, black tipped ears. Powered by strong back legs, the Hare can reach speeds of up to 65km/h. It lives entirely above ground, crouching in shallow earth depressions, and feeds on cereal crops and plants. Brown Hares have declined rapidly in Oxfordshire, but can still be seen at Shotover.

*Rattus norvegicus*

**Brown Rat:** Lives in crops and hedgerows, and makes its nest in underground tunnels. Rats can live in social groups with a strict dominance hierarchy. They are active at dawn, dusk and by night. They eat bird eggs and carrion and are adept egg stealers. There is a belief that, working in pairs, one rat will lie on its back with an egg on its stomach and the other pulls it along by its tail.

*Clethrionomys glareolus* and *Microtus agrestis*

**Voles: Bank Voles** live in woodlands and feed on plants, insects and fruit. **Field Voles** are found in rough grassland and young woodland. They feed mainly on grasses and other plants. Field Voles breed mainly in the summer. Both Bank and Field Voles are common on Shotover and live in ball-like nests made from vegetation. Owls and foxes prey upon both species.

*Apodemus sylvaticus*, *Micromys minutus* and *Mus musculus*

**Wood Mouse, Harvest Mouse and House Mouse:** Wood Mice occur on the edge of woodland, scrub, arable fields and gardens. They feed on grain, seeds, nuts, fungi and fruit, and occasionally insects, worms and snails. The Harvest Mouse is tiny and is distinguished by its long tail, which it can coil around a twig leaving its front feet free to grip food. Harvest Mice live in thick, tall vegetation. They are great nest builders. Their feeding habits are similar to the Wood Mouse. The House Mouse can be found in urban areas and feeds on grain and food scraps.

*Sorex araneus* and *Sorex minutus*

**Shrews: Common shrew** is found in damp places where it feeds on insects, slugs, worms and spiders. It can dig burrows to live in, but more often occupies abandoned animal holes. The **Pigmy Shrew** is Britain's smallest mammal and consumes its own body weight in food daily! They have a similar lifestyle to the Common Shrew. Pigmy Shrews are not common in the region, but *Shotover Wildlife* has found that there are good numbers on Shotover. Locally, they are predated by Kestrels and carnivorous mammals.

*Sciurus carolinensis*

**Grey Squirrel:** The Grey Squirrel was introduced from America around 1900, and as a result of competition the native Red Squirrel has declined. It spends most of its life in trees and feeds on a variety of seeds and fruit. On Shotover, Grey Squirrels can cause damage to trees, especially Birch and Sycamore, but in doing so provide homes for other organisms.

*Talpa europae*

**Mole:** Occurs in large numbers in meadows, parks and woodland. It lives underground using its shovel-like forefeet to dig a series of tunnels, and at the same time making the well-known molehills. It feeds chiefly on earthworms and slugs, and is predated by foxes on Shotover.

**CHIROPTERA**

**Bats:** There are at least two man-made hibernacula at Shotover. The large diversity of flying insects on Shotover makes it ideal for bats.

*Capreolus capreolus* and *Dama dama*

**Roe and Fallow Deer:**

Roe Deer



Both live in parkland and woodland and feed on plants, fruit and tree bark. In autumn, Roe Deer shed their antlers and grow a new set in the following January. Both deer are often seen passing through the Shotover area, including the adult male Fallow Deer with its huge antlers.

*Muntiacus reevesi*

**Muntjac Deer:** Originally introduced to parks from Asia the Muntjac has prospered in the UK. It lives in woodlands and visits gardens, and feeds on plants and fruit, especially young shoots. Muntjac is the smallest deer on Shotover and the most frequently seen.

### Shotover, a secret world of wildlife

There are many more mammals on Shotover than are actually seen, from the common Rabbit to the elusive Weasel. Mammals are at the top of the food chain and depend upon the diversity of plants and creatures further down the chain. For example, Pigmy Shrews require a vast quantity of insects every day.

Shotover also has a colourful history of mammals, and was a favourite area for the hunting of Wild Boar by the Kings of England.

One legend is of a student of Queens College Oxford, who was wandering in the woods of Shotover Hill, when he was attacked by a Wild Boar. Shocked, he shoved his book down the Wild Boar's throat, shouting 'Graecum est!' ('it's Greek!'). Of course, the Wild Boar of old are no longer on Shotover, but there is still a world of wildlife to be discovered, and you can find out about it in this leaflet.

**Shotover Wildlife** is a voluntary organisation founded to research and communicate the importance of Shotover Hill for wildlife

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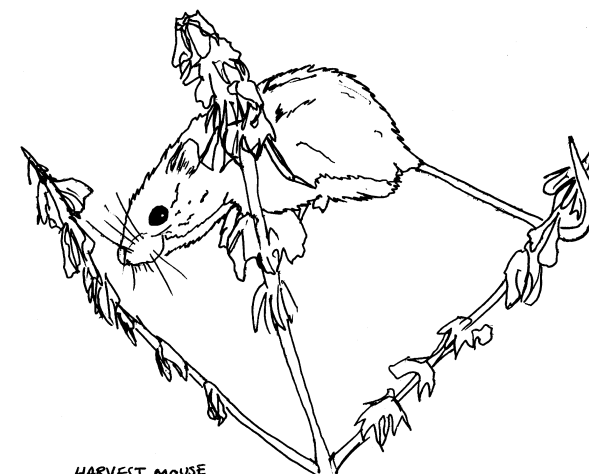
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# MAMMALS

## on SHOTOVER



HARVEST MOUSE

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