Small mammal trapping on Eynsham Abbey Fishponds

In mainland Britain, the group of animals known as small mammals is made up of seven species of rodents (mice, voles and dormice), and three species of insectivores (shrews). The rodents are the house mouse (*Mus domesticus* ), yellow-necked mouse (*Apodemus flavicollis*), wood mouse (*Apodemus sylvaticus*), harvest mouse (*Micromys minutus*), common dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*), bank vole (*Clethrionomys glareolus*), and field vole (*Microtus agrestis*), and the three species of shrew are the common shrew (*Sorex araneus*), pigmy shrew (*S. minutus*), and water shrew (*Neomys fodiens*). Of these species, the mice and voles are probably the most abundant mammals found in the British Isles, whereas the common dormouse is a rare species which is protected by law under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (Flowerdew, 1993). Habitat loss and fragmentation may be threatening the survival of small mammal populations, many of which form an important part of the food chain for other, larger species. For example, mice and voles are prey animals for owls and other birds of prey, and for foxes All small mammals also play a key role in maintaining habitat structure and community stability.

In order to identify which species were present on the site of the Abbey fishponds at Eynsham (Grid Reference: SP 431090), live trapping of small mammals (mice, voles and shrews) was carried out between 14th and 17th June 2004 inclusive. Trapping was done using Longworth Live Traps containing hay for bedding and wild bird seed, peanuts and caster (blow-fly pupae) for food. The traps were set out in four transects in differing habitat types (Figure 1) with two traps being placed at each of the 21 points. The traps were checked at 12 hour intervals daily (approximately 07.00 and 19.00 hours). Any animal captured was fur-clip marked, to identify it should it be recaptured at a later time, and released at point of capture.

Traps were placed as follows (Figure 1):
W1 – W5 along the northern, wooded edge of the site.
W6 – W8 in north/south line in the dense *Epilobium/Arrhenatherum*
1 – 7 in a north/south line across the wettest part of the site
H1 – H6 along the southern edge of the site close to the Chilbrook Stream.

33 individual animals were captured over the three day period i.e. 19 wood mice (*Apodemus sylvaticus*), 13 bank voles (*Clethrionomys glareolus*) and one common shrew (*Sorex araneus*) (Table 1). All were in a healthy condition with many of the females either pregnant or lactating, indicating that there is adequate food and cover for these species. A number of juvenile animals (animals born earlier this year and not yet sexually active) were also captured. No animals were captured in W6 – W8, the transect through the dense *Epilobium/Arrhenatherum* nor at W1 and W3 along the northern boundary (Table 1). This may be because the vegetation is too dense in the W6 – W8 transect while there was possibly not enough ground cover at W1 and W3. None of the animals recorded on site are rare. All are widespread and thought to be abundant in the British Isles.

Any work which is carried out on the site will, inevitably, disturb these animals. However, the size of the site and the close proximity of other suitable habitats (e.g. farmland, gardens, hedges) would act as a refuge for the animals which would then re-colonise the disturbed area once the work was completed and the habitat returns to a suitable state.

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