

Summary of Tracking Mammals Partnership meeting and Action Points

10th June 2009

Simon Poulton began the meeting by giving an overview of small mammal monitoring that has taken place, and the small mammal monitoring pilot that the Mammal Society have been testing. An 'index of information content' was calculated for the different methods tested and a cost/benefit analysis carried out. Intensive trapping provided the most information and was the most cost-effective, but it is very intensive work for which relying on volunteers can lead to potential risks in terms of recruitment and continuing involvement of volunteers.

This led to a discussion on the use of volunteers. Key points were that volunteers should only be used for what they are capable of doing, and need to be given regular feedback to convince them that their work is being of use and so encourage them to continue volunteering. There is a need to find out if volunteers relate to the TMP in any way, and so whether feedback to volunteers should come from the TMP or just from the schemes/organisations that they provide data to. There is also a need to investigate if web-based reporting is an appropriate means of feedback that will reach the volunteers who contribute data.

We then discussed what information we need people to collect, and why we need this information. Different levels of information are needed for different species as they have different policy drivers. The Habitats Directive is the strongest legislative driver for surveillance, but is not the requirement for the highest quality surveillance. BAP reporting often requires more detailed information as it is linked to conservation management for species. For NGOs, surveillance data is the real basis of what they need to help them achieve their conservation objectives.

Session two was to consider whether we are making the right impact. To answer this we need to identify target audiences, and, again, we need to establish what information is needed and why. David Macdonald reminded us that questions being discussed have already been considered in the past and referred us to the report 'Proposals for future monitoring of British Mammals'¹. Overall there does not appear to be a strong policy driver to monitor all small rodents. However, it is important that we make the most of the information we do have. It was agreed that it would be more effective to update mammal trends on the TMP website annually, rather than continuing to produce a new leaflet reporting on trends each year. Lawrence Way emphasised that we would have greater impact amongst policy makers if we 'added value' to trends by interpreting them in the light of other evidence, by analysing against other datasets where necessary.

¹ Proposals for future monitoring of British Mammals, D.W. Macdonald, G. Mace, and S. Rushton (1998). Published by Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, ISBN 1-85112-076-9.

Session three was to consider where the Partnership wants to be in the near future. Further work is needed to explore driver requirements to identify what further monitoring and analysis is required. Any mammal surveillance data that is not currently easily accessible should be put onto the NBN to produce a better species distribution overview and ensure that detailed information that has been collected that is required for planning is made available. It is possible that funding from OPAL could be obtained to employ someone to help achieve this, working with the NGOs, CEH and the NBN. In addition to adding distribution data to the NBN, further layers could be added to the NBN map, for example mammal density. As an initial task, Helen Roy said that CEH would be happy to collate data on non-native species. In addition to ensuring data are accessible, organisations in the partnership should consider how to make best use of their data, for example by using data to support thematic reviews. Expertise for detailed analysis is sometimes lacking in individual NGOs in the partnership, so sharing of expertise amongst the partners may be helpful. However, it was agreed that the partnership should not go beyond a collaborative initiative – organisations in the partnership would like to maintain their individual identities above the corporate TMP identity. It was also concluded that in the near future, we should concentrate financial and personnel resources towards a web based publication of mammal trends and partner project – hosted on the TMP website – and include more evidence-based (un-biased) interpretation of trends.

Action Points

1. Revise objectives of partnership to include working together to meet evidence needs that influence policy and other goals, e.g. advocacy and public awareness.
2. JNCC to work with its current monitoring partners (BTO/BCT/GWCT) to scope feasibility of using the TMP website to present monitoring data of mammal species and to interpret it to the best of our knowledge. After sample pages have been produced, other partners would be consulted and asked to provide feedback.
3. CEH to conduct a rapid species by species and partner by partner assessment of the actual data sources that exist which could be mobilised by NBN (to include local scale data that could be useful for planners and people making local management plans). This would provide a basis of assessment of whether we need to get further resources (e.g. through OPAL) to get data mobilised. This is a particular priority for non-natives.
4. All partners to identify and report back to the partnership on any gaps in information (data requirements for different species, what quality of distribution data is needed and at what frequencies and what scales) that need to be filled – either where further data collection is needed or where further analyses are needed.
5. Research if volunteers use the TMP website and the leaflet, and if not if we want the TMP to be a source of volunteer feedback or prefer to use it to influence other audiences.