



Marlborough Downs Space for Nature Guide to small mammals



© [Vince Garvey](#) via Flickr

Wood mouse/Field mouse

Apodemus sylvaticus

Identification: The wood mouse is a 'stereotypical' mouse in terms of appearance and has a chestnut-brown back and white belly. Long tail, large ears and big eyes. Moves quickly by hopping/jumping.

Size: 8-10cm with a very long tail of up to 10cm.

Habitat: Often found in woodland and fields but also common in a variety of other habitats. Generally the most often caught in small mammal surveys.



© [Richard Adams](#) via Flickr

House mouse

Mus musculus

Identification: Grey-brown all over including the undersides.

Size: 7-9cm with a tail of up to 10cm.

Habitat: Commonly associated with houses, buildings and barns, although also found in the countryside. This species is one of the more commonly spotted due to its cohabitation with humans.



© [Charlie Marshall](#) via Flickr

Harvest mouse

Micromys minutus

Identification: A very small mouse with golden fur and white undersides. Its long tail is prehensile and can be used as an extra 'limb' to hold onto vegetation as it climbs.

Size: The UK's smallest rodent; roughly 5-7cm in length.

Habitat: Lives in long vegetation such as reed beds, marshes and roadside verges. Builds small, round nests made of intertwined grass stalks.



© [Teemu Lehtinen](#) via Flickr

Yellow-necked mouse

Apodemus flavicollis

Identification: This species looks almost the same as the wood mouse in appearance, except that the yellow-brown colouration on its back continues around in a band across the neck.

Size: 9.5-12cm, very slightly larger than the wood mouse. Tail 8-12cm in length.

Habitat: Woodland, hedgerows and gardens; range is restricted mainly to southern Britain.

There are four species of mice in the UK. All have relatively large eyes and ears and long scaly tails with little or no hair. The dormouse is not technically a mouse but is related to both mice and squirrels.



Marlborough Downs Space for Nature Guide to small mammals



© [Frank Vassen](#) via Flickr

Hazel Dormouse

Muscardinus avellanarius

Identification: Golden fur, big ears and eyes. The most characteristic feature is their incredibly fluffy tail. Sometimes mistaken for a young squirrel.

Size: 6-9cm, tail 5.5-7cm.

Habitat: Dormice are arboreal, meaning that they spend most of their lives in trees, although they return to the ground to hibernate during winter. Found in coniferous, deciduous and mixed woodland – though often preferred, hazel is not a habitat requirement.



© [Peter Trimming](#) via Flickr

Bank Vole

Myodes glareolus

Identification: Red-brown upper coat with a pale cream/grey underside. The bank vole's tail is about half the length of its body. This is an important distinguishing factor for comparison with the field vole which has a proportionately shorter tail.

Size: 9-11cm, tail length 3-7cm.

Habitat: The bank vole is often found in hedgerows, heathland, grassland and woodland, as well as in more urban areas.

Voles have much shorter and more rounded snouts than mice, and tend to have smaller ears and eyes in proportion to their body size. There are three species of vole native to mainland UK: two of these species – the bank and field vole – are very similar and easily confused.



© [Jeremy Halls](#) via Flickr

Field Vole

Microtus agrestis

Identification: The fur of the field vole is more yellow-brown than the bank vole. It is often described as 'cooler' in colour. The underside is creamy-grey. Its tail is about a third of the length of its body. For this reason it is also known as the short-tailed field vole.

Size: 9-12 cm in length (not including tail).

Habitat: Ungrazed grasslands and areas of tussock are the preferred habitat, although this adaptable mammal will find a home wherever grass is available.



© [Peter Trimming](#) via Flickr

Water Vole

Arvicola amphibius

Identification: Dark brown fur and a hairy tail which is about half the length of the head and body. Characteristic bright yellow teeth.

Size: Up to 22cm in length excluding the tail. Roughly rat-sized (double the size of the field and bank voles).

Habitat: As the name suggests, this vole spends much of its life in the water. They live in burrows alongside river canals and are most often spotted swimming.



Marlborough Downs Space for Nature Guide to small mammals



© [Jo Garbutt](#) via Flickr

Common shrew

Sorex araneus

Identification: Fur is three-toned, transitioning from dark brown on the back to paler brown to white on its undersides. The common shrew has a tail which is roughly half the length of the body; this is shorter, proportionally, than that of the pygmy shrew.

Size: 4-8cm in length, tail 2.5-4.5cm.

Habitat Widespread across a variety of habitats including gardens, hedgerows, grassland and woodland.



© [Andrew](#) via Flickr

Pygmy shrew

Sorex minutus

Identification Two-toned fur going from a grey-brown upper to an off-white belly. The pygmy shrew has a longer and wider tail in proportion to its body when compared with the common shrew; roughly two-thirds of its body length.

Size: 4-6cm in length, tail 3-5cm.

Habitat: Widespread across a variety of habitats including hedgerows, grassland and woodland.



© [Ulrike & Jörg](#) via Flickr

Water Shrew

Neomys fodiens

Identification: Black/dark brown fur on top, with a very contrasting pale grey underside. Often have little silver ear tufts and white hairs around the eyes.

Size: 6-10cm, the UK's largest shrew species. Tail 4.5-7.5cm.

Habitat: Usually found near streams and wetlands. If you see a shrew swimming, it is most likely this species! They even swim underwater to hunt for prey.



© [Wildlife Wanderer](#) via Flickr

European Mole

Talpa europaea

Identification: Cylindrical body with subby tail. Covered in short, dense, velvety fur – black to taupe – with squat limbs that end in pinkish, spade-like paws.

Size: Up to 14 cm in length, tail 3 cm.

Habitat: Digs subterranean burrows, throwing up soil hills.

There are three species of shrew native to mainland UK. Shrews tend to be smaller than most other species of small mammal found in the UK, and have a distinctive long pointed snout and very small eyes and ears.



FUN FACTS!

Did you know?

When startled, water voles dive into the water making a characteristic 'plop' sound. So, be sure to keep an ear out when walking alongside rivers.

Did you know?

The water shrew is a venomous mammal. Its saliva can paralyse even larger prey such as frogs and newts.

Did you know?

Moles will come to the surface to collect nesting material and to look for food when the soil is dry. Young moles come to the surface to look for new homes when they leave their mother's burrow

Did you know?

Common shrews have a very high metabolism and must eat every 2-3 hours in order to survive.

Did you know?

The field vole is estimated to be the most abundant mammal in the UK, although it is rarely seen. Look out for small round tunnels in areas of long grass. You may even find a 'lawn' at the entrance with shortened grass and piles of grass cuttings.

Did you know?

The average adult harvest mouse weighs roughly the same as a two pence piece!