

MAMMALWATCHING IN ENGLAND

FEBRUARI 2015



After a family visit to London, we decided to see what England has to offer mammal-wise. After receiving much helpful information on the mammalwatching forum, we decided to focus on Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire. We had a very pleasant trip although we had obviously not picked the best season for watching mammals.

Traveling in England is easy, but sometimes a bit slow as there are not highways everywhere. Sleeping was pretty expensive (rates of up to 140€ for an average room were no exception!?!), unless you selected your hotels carefully. We were again surprised by the ridiculously bad mobile internet connections in Europe, especially compared to “less developed countries” (think again!) in for example South-East Asia.

The mammals were not too hard to find, especially thanks to the info we received. For people from “the continent” many of the most interesting species of the English mammal fauna are introduced/invasive species because we don’t have them around here. Next to these exotic creatures, we were lucky to enjoy some of the other great animals that the UK has to offer. We missed the water vole, but we had many other great wildlife encounters, some of which had seemed rather unrealistic at first. Highlights were the many muntjacs, two weasels, the seal colony at Horsey Gap and the small mammals caught by Mark Hows. Hopefully this trip report will be useful for future mammal watchers. We also included a lot of information on the species that are very easy to see, just to give those who are not so familiar with the region no excuse to miss them.

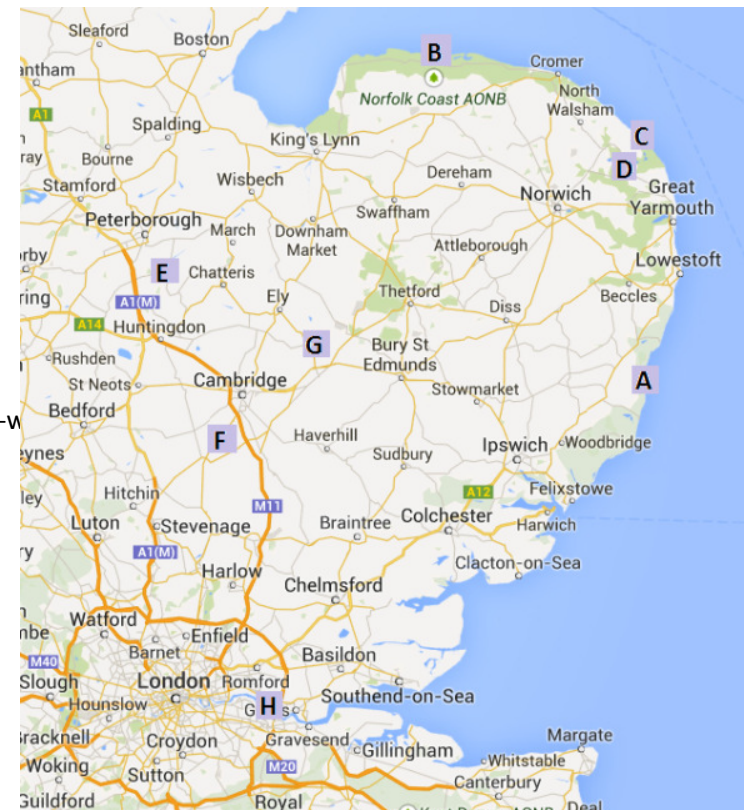
Tim and Stefanie

This trip report includes

1. List of sightings for each location
2. Picture of each species → for more pictures, see:
<https://mammaling.wordpress.com/2015/03/16/trip-report-mammal-watching-in-the-uk-february-2015/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpdmMmYUIH3Q&feature=youtu.be>
3. Extra information on the locations and sightings

List of locations

- A. Minsmere RSPB <https://mammaling.wordpress.com/2015/03/16/trip-report-mammal-w>
- B. Norfolk Coast Area
- C. Horsey Gap
- D. Hickling Broad National Nature Reserve + Stubb Mill
- E. Woodwalton Fen
- F. Fowlmere RSPB
- G. Newmarket
- H. Rainham Marshes RSPB



List of sightings for each location

| Locations and names | Info |
|---|---|
| A. Minsmere RSPB. February 3: whole day | |
| 1. Rabbit - <i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i> | In the grass fields, throughout the day |
| 2. Grey squirrel - <i>Sciurus carolinensis</i> | In any area with more than one tree, throughout the day. They were quite skittish though. |
| 3. Reeve's muntjac - <i>Muntiacus reevesi</i> | Mostly seen in pairs, throughout the day in the cover of the forest, out in the open only in the late afternoon. |
| 4. Red deer - <i>Cervus elaphus</i> | Two small herds at around noon |
| 5. Otter - <i>Lutra lutra</i> | Several are showing almost every day from the Island Mere hide. They can be seen at any time of the day, but most sightings seem to be in the morning (9-10am) and afternoon (3-4pm). There are at least a lone male (which we saw) and a female with cubs. |
| B. Norfolk Coast Area. February 4: whole day | |
| 6. European hare – <i>Lepus europaeus</i> | More than 10 animals were seen in the region, especially in the later afternoon they were easy to spot in the fields. |
| C. Horsey Gap. February 5: morning | |
| 7. Grey seal - <i>Halichoerus grypus</i> | A colony on the beach at Horsey Gap. |
| D. Hickling Broad National Nature Reserve + Stubb Mill. February 5: afternoon | |
| Grey squirrel | One animal was seen in a garden while driving from Horsey Gap to Hickling Broad. |
| Muntjac | Several in the fields bordering the reserve. |
| Rabbit | Several in the fields around Stubb mill. |
| 8. Weasel - <i>Mustela nivalis</i> | One on the path at Stubb mill. |
| 9. Chinese water deer - <i>Hydropotes inermis</i> | One in the fields around Stubb mill. |

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| E. Woodwalton Fen. February 6: morning | |
| Muntjac | One seen at around 9.30am and one heard barking |
| Chinese waterdeer | One seen at around 10.15am |
| 10. Red fox - <i>Vulpes vulpes</i> | One seen at around 10.15am |
| F. Fowlmere RSPB. February 6: afternoon | |
| Muntjac | Very easy to see during the whole afternoon. The later it got, the more popped up. |
| Rabbit | One or two animals were seen in one of the fields bordering the reserve |
| Badger | Only a burrow was seen. A visit after dark should be productive |
| 11. Fallow deer - <i>Dama dama</i> | Three animals, including a while one, were seen in the reedbed. |
| G. Newmarket. February 7: morning | |
| 12. Harvest mouse - <i>Micromys minutus</i> | One from a small mammal trap. |
| 13. Field vole - <i>Microtus agrestis</i> | Two from small mammal traps. |
| 14. Water shrew - <i>Neomys fodiens</i> | One from a small mammal trap. |
| H. Rainham Marshes RSPB. February 7: afternoon | |
| Muntjac | A pair was seen along the highway Cambridge-London at around 1pm. |
| 15. Brown rat - <i>Rattus norvegicus</i> | Multiple animals were eating from the bird food that had fallen from the feeding stations at the wildlife garden behind the visitor center and at a feeding station in the woodland area of the reserve. |
| Weasel | We saw one hunting along the trail. |
| No specific location | |
| Badger - <i>Meles meles</i> | One roadkill was seen while driving from Dover to London; also burrows in Fowlmere RSPB |
| Mole - <i>Talpa europaea</i> | Molehills were encountered in pretty much every field but no animals were seen. |

Pictures

Water shrew - *Neomys fodiens*



Mole - *Talpa europaea*



Grey squirrel - *Sciurus carolinensis*



Field vole - *Microtus agrestis*



Brown rat - *Rattus norvegicus*



Harvest mouse - *Micromys minutus*



Rabbit - *Oryctolagus cuniculus*



European hare – *Lepus europaeus*



Chinese water deer - *Hydropotes inermis*



Reeve's muntjac - *Muntiacus reevesi*



Red deer - *Cervus elaphus*



Fallow deer - *Dama dama*



Otter - *Lutra lutra*



Weasel - *Mustela nivalis*



Red fox - *Vulpes vulpes*



Grey seal - *Halichoerus grypus*



Badger - *Meles meles*



Konik poney - *Equus ferus*



A. Minsmere RSPB

How to get there: Follow brown tourist signs from A12 at Yoxford (if coming from south) or Blythburgh (from north) to Westleton. From Westleton, take Dunwich road, then take first right, following brown tourist signs. Turn left at crossroads, then follow reserve entrance track, with speed bumps (20 mph limit). Turn left at Scotts Hall and car park is a further 1 km (half a mile).

Coordinates: 52.24746, 1.61705

Price: A ridiculously high charge of 8£pp for non-members was collected at the visitor center.

Extra info: This reserve has everything to accommodate tourist groups (shop, toilets, restaurant, huge car park...). The reserve closes at 5pm (there is a gate). We were provided with a map and a list of recent sightings. We spent the morning in the Bittern and Island Mere hides. We had just missed an otter at the Island Mere hide, which had shown at 9.40 and 10.15am. Muntjacs and grey squirrels were easily seen throughout the day. Especially the muntjacs were very approachable. We saw a bittern flying by at around 10.45am. Other birds of notice were a water pipit and two whooper swans. Shortly after lunchtime we walked a part of the woodland trail and we easily found two small herds of red deer between the trees. The best part of the afternoon was again spent in the Island Mere hide until we saw an otter swimming across the far end of the lake at 3pm. We quickly walked a part of the sea side trail. Just past the visitor center is a pond with a bridge that should be good for water vole, but we didn't see any during two 15min stake outs. At dusk we spotted a couple of muntjacs and a few rabbits in the North Marsh.



B. Norfolk Coast Area

How to get there: The road from Cromer to Hunstanton is nice to follow.

Coordinates: /

Extra info: We needed a whole day for the route and we stopped here and there to watch birds or to try for mammals. The weather wasn't too good and we had regular showers. The only mammal we saw was the European hare. The first ones were seen in a field south of Cley (approximately here: 52.942248, 1.056294). Four animals looked pretty exposed to the rain in the middle of a field. We also saw four animals in a field across from the Titchwell RSPB reserve. In the late afternoon, the weather improved and we saw about 10 animals more in the fields between Hunstanton and Cley.

Blakeney point is well known for its seal colony (both grey and common seals are present). To see the animals, you'd probably have to take a boat ride from the nearby town called Morston. A boat ride is about 10£ pp for an hour or so. The boats don't sail every day (especially not on a rainy February day in the middle of the week). This trip may be especially interesting during the breeding season (grey seal: November-December; common seal: June-July). We hoped to see some marine mammals from the shore (seals, harbor porpoise) but we were not successful. The road from Cromer to Hunstanton is quite far from the sea. We walked up to the shore a couple of times, but without success.

We also stopped at Holkam beach in Holkham village for birdwatching (car park open from 6am-5 or 9pm, depending on the season; charges for parking are about 1£/hour). We saw lots of pink-footed geese and a barn owl was hunting in a field at about 4pm.

C. Horsey Gap

How to get there: Dirt road that starts from the main road between Sea Palling and Winterton-on-Sea. Horsey Gap is signposted from the main road.

Coordinates: 52.758605, 1.650484

Price: They charge you for parking your car (1£ per hour, you'll need at least 2 hours).

Extra info: From the carpark it's a 20min walk along the dunes to the colony (well signposted, can't be missed). Seal pups may be present in November-December (main period seems to be at the end of November). The beach may be very crowded during that period. We visited the colony (50+ adults) during the best part of an hour and we saw 6 other people during that time. The seals can be easily approached, but any sensible seal watcher will of course keep his/her distance as to not disturb the seals. Apparently there is some level of surveillance of the colony by officials during the breeding period, to limit disturbance by not-so-sensible seal watchers.

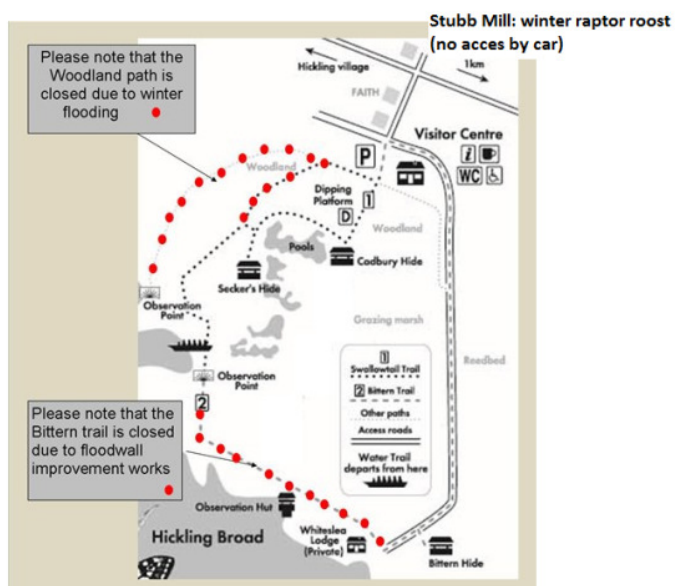
D. Hickling Broad National Nature Reserve + Stubb Mill

How to get there: The reserve is close to the tiny villages of Hickling Heath, Hickling Green and Stubb. Sutton along the A149 is also nearby and is a bit larger.

Coordinates: 52.741953, 1.595599

Price: 4£ for an adult (non-member)

Extra info: The small visitor center is open from March/April until October. During the other months you're asked to pay your entrance fee in a box provided. I don't seem to remember a gate at the car park. The reserve has a few hiking trails, most of which are closed during winter due to floods. There are a couple of hides but bird activity was very low. There were lots of deer tracks on all the trails, suggesting that there may be lots of deer present in the reserve. We saw none as we visited in the early afternoon (2-3pm) but a short walk later on (4.30pm) did not produce anything either. Stubb Mill is a short hike away from the visitor center. It is not located within trail network of the rest of the nature reserve. You could either walk along the road (taking your car is not allowed, see map for more info) or you could walk along the reserve. Just before reaching the car park, there is a wide path on the left that leads towards the mill. We saw the reserve's Konik ponies and a couple of rabbits while walking towards the mill. We also saw a first pair of cranes flying over. At the mill there was a lot of noise from some maintenance works. We were surprised to see a weasel along the path, in front of the mill just before reaching the tarred road. The weasel was very active and just minutes later, we spotted it on the other side of the small river. Hence, it had somehow managed to cross the bridge without us noticing it. From the viewing platform we saw a pair of cranes in the fields and another pair flew over. There were also some distant marsh harriers. At dusk we drove along the road between the visitor center and the village of Stubb and we spotted a few muntjac. Then we also decided to drive towards Stubb mill (there were no other cars anyway, so we wouldn't cause any traffic jams or other problems). There were no animals of notice at the raptor viewing platform, but we spotted a Chinese water deer in one of the fields. Spotlighting in this general area may be interesting, but we didn't have time or knowledge of drivable local roads to do so.



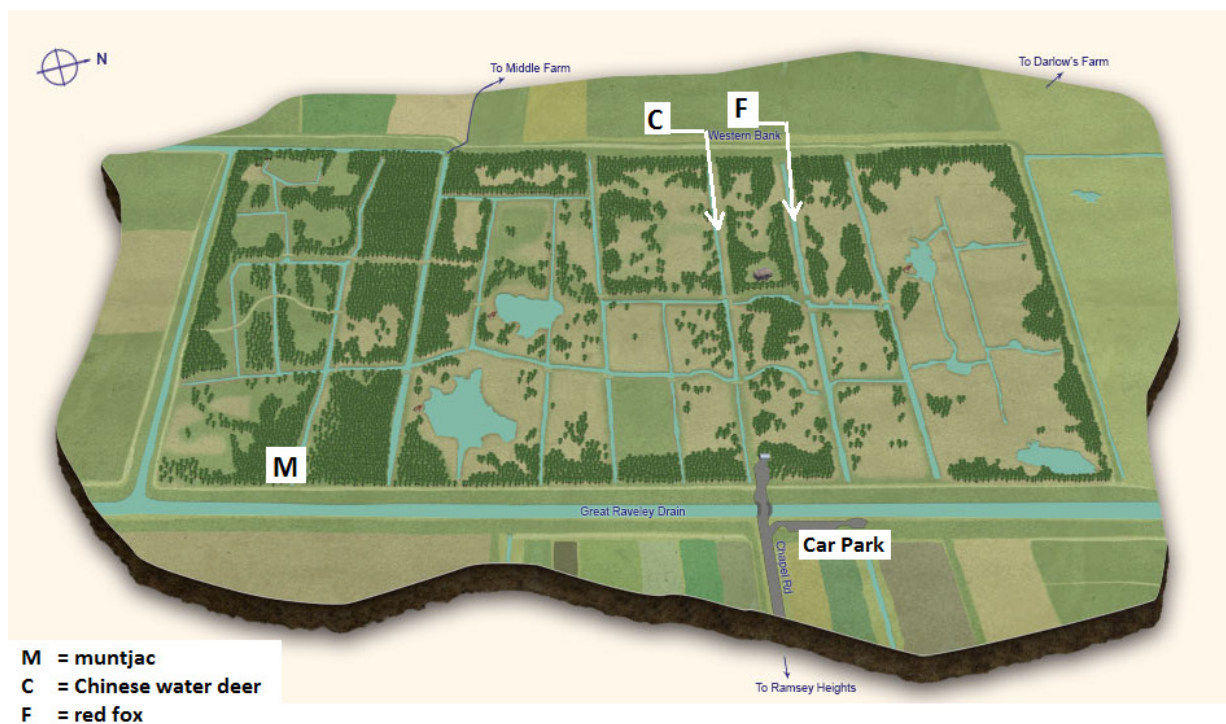
E. Woodwalton Fen

How to get there: Woodwalton Fen is at the end of Chapel Road in Ramsey Heights village (Sat Navs may list 'Heights Drove Road').

Coordinates: 52.44764,-0.184636

Price: No entrance fee

Extra info: It's best to visit early, so make sure that no other visitors have already startled the deer, causing them to seek refuge in the extensive reed beds. The deer like to hang out by the Western Bank, which is where we saw our only Chinese water deer. The path is located on a dike. This allows for great visibility, which unfortunately works in two ways and the animals we saw quickly spotted us. Apparently, seeing only one deer is unusual. Judging by the huge number of tracks and fresh droppings, the densities must be very high. We visited at around 8.30am, which may have been too late (although we seemed to be the first ones there). It probably also didn't help that it had been very cold the night before. The grass and earth on all the trails was completely frozen which caused a noise while walking that even a deaf deer would have heard from miles away. The one deer we saw was hurt pretty bad, although its ears seemed fine, and quickly limped away (we didn't follow it, so its running effort was a bit exaggerated). The deer, and also the fox, that we saw on the Western bank knew very well where to run into the reserve. They rushed along the reed bed and then crossed the path on the dike at the exact spot where other trails ran into the reserve. We also heard a muntjac barking. The only bird of notice was a marsh harrier. There is no barrier at the car park.



F. Fowlmere RSPB

How to get there: From the A10 (Cambridge to Royston) turn towards Fowlmere at the Fowlmere-Shepreth crossroads (no RSPB sign); after 1 mile (1.5 km), turn right by the cemetery (RSPB sign); after another 0.6 mile (1 km), turn left into the reserve (RSPB sign)

Coordinates: 52.09534, 0.05108

Price: No entry fee

Extra info: We saw muntjacs during the whole afternoon. They were incredibly abundant and easy to see. Most muntjac we saw were single animals, but we also saw a female with a large fawn from the boardwalk. At the far end of the reserve, in some woodland area, there was a large badger burrow but we didn't stick around long enough to see the badgers. At around 4pm three fallow deer showed in the reedbed that can be overlooked from the reedbed hide. In the week before our visit, otters had been spotted from the reedbed hide and from the Drewer hide, but we didn't get lucky. This reserve is also good for small mammals such as water shrew, stoats, weasels, ...



We met up with fellow mammal enthusiastic Mark Hows. Mark had set some small mammal traps and we were treated to the “catch of the day”. We also tried a site for water voles. A waterrail tried his best impression of swimming water vole, but the voles themselves did not show. We did see their burrows.

How to get there: The reserve is located off New Tank Hill Road (A1090) in Purfleet which is just off the A1306 between Rainham and Lakeside. This is accessible from the Aveley, Wennington and Purfleet junction off the A13 and J30/31 of the M25.

Price: Entrance fee applies to non-members, but we got a free “first visits”.

Extra info: A nice reserve that is located within a very urban area (highway, train, ...). The marshes attract lots of ducks and waders. This reserve is also very good for water vole, which we unfortunately did not see. Weasels and stoats are also noteworthy. The reserve is quite exposed; hence a visit on cold windy days or hot sunny days may be rather unpleasant. The park closes at 5pm.

