

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES ON BUTE MAMMALS

By J. A. Gibson

The following notes on the mammals of Bute are supplementary to the information contained in my original paper on the mammals of the Island (Gibson, 1970) and the additions thereto (Gibson, 1976), and as such I trust they keep our knowledge of Bute mammals up to date. As always, for much assistance I am very grateful to my colleagues in the Buteshire Natural History Society, and to the Marquess of Bute and many members of the staff of Bute Estates. To Mr. James R. Middleton I am particularly grateful for many extremely interesting notes from Inchmarnock.

Order INSECTIVORA

HEDGEHOG *Erinaceus europaeus* L.

In 1972 two Hedgehogs were introduced to Inchmarnock, one by Mr Dan Boag and another by Mr James Middleton. At the time neither knew of the other's action, but the Hedgehogs appear to have been of the correct sex since several young were seen two years later. Successful breeding continued, and indeed there appeared to be a population explosion during 1975-1977, with dozens of Hedgehogs to be seen all over the island. Recently, however, numbers have substantially reduced, and Mr Middleton is of the opinion that the animals themselves are getting distinctly smaller, probably because of in-breeding since the original introduction appears to have consisted entirely of two individuals.

On several occasions Mr Middleton has seen Hedgehogs down on the beach at low tide at dusk; careful observation showed that they were clearly eating winkles.

MOLE *Talpa europaea* L.

Some slight indication of the population of Moles on Bute can be gained from the information that the local mole-trapper, working over some 300-400 acres of farm land near Ettrick Bay, killed 500 Moles in 1978, 250 in 1979, and 100 in 1980; he was also killing Moles elsewhere on Bute during this time.

WATER-SHREW *Neomys fodiens* (Pennant)

Two Water-Shrews were live-trapped in the Beaver Wood, near Kilchattan Bay, during the last week of June 1979 by Dr Gibson and were later released. A specimen caught by Mr James Robertson's cat in Shalunt Wood, near Rhubodach, at the beginning of September 1980 was given to Mr Alex Stephen, who duly

passed it on to Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow, where it has been made into a study skin.

Positive records of the Water-Shrew on Bute have always been uncommon, so these occurrences are worth recording.

Order CHIROPTERA

LONG-EARED BAT *Plecotus auritus* (L.)

In spring 1978 David and Robert Middleton found two Long-eared Bats roosting in a small sheltered rocky overhang in the woods on Inchmarnock. This is a new record for the island.

Order CARNIVORA

FOX *Vulpes vulpes* (L.)

During late summer 1980 several reports were received of a Fox having been seen at the north end of Bute; since then a watch has been kept by the Estate gamekeepers, so far without result. John Blain, in his *History* of the 1820s, did record that Foxes "had swummed from Argyllshire, across the Kyle". It is not impossible that this may still happen from time to time, but it is certainly many years since the last report of a Fox on Bute.

STOAT *Mustela erminea* L.

In my original Bute mammal paper I said that few Stoats on Bute turned pure white in winter (*TBNHS* 18: 10). Although most Bute Stoats do show varying degrees of brown during the winter months I have now been informed by Mr Derek Street, and other observers, that over the years a good many apparently pure white Stoats have also been seen.

In early 1975 Mr James Middleton saw a Stoat on Inchmarnock, and during the next three years there were many subsequent sightings of what was presumably the same animal, or possibly even a pair. No young were ever seen, however, and no Stoat has been seen on Inchmarnock since December 1977. There is no firm evidence as to how the Stoat reached Inchmarnock; early in 1975, however, some large agricultural machinery was ferried across to the island, and locally it is thought the most likely explanation is that the Stoat was an accidental stowaway.

AMERICAN MINK *Mustela vison* Schreber

In January 1963 it became necessary to obtain a license to keep Mink, and in my original paper on the mammals of Bute (1970) I said that "According to official returns no Mink are kept on Bute". This was technically correct, but subsequent information has shown that a Mink farm was, in fact, established at Hawkstone Lodge (on the east shore, near the Hermitage) from mid-1961 to mid-1967. During this time the average breeding stock was 80 females and 30-40 males, and the farm ultimately built up to a peak of 250 animals killed each year. It must have been a well-run establishment, since there is no evidence of any escapes and to the

best of my knowledge no feral Mink are known on Bute.

In 1976, however, a Mink was caught swimming from Arran to Holy Island (*Western Nat.*, 5: 111-112); since then several additional Mink have been caught on Holy Island, and recently one was caught on Pladda. Although at present there are apparently very few Mink on the Cowal mainland adjacent to Bute, nevertheless, in view of this experience on Arran, it is not inconceivable that Mink could reach the Island of Bute by natural means at some future date.

FERRET *Mustela putorius furo* L.

It is clear that there are still a good few Ferrets living in the wild state on Bute, but I have had no evidence of genuine feral breeding for the past three years. On Inchmarnock, however, the position is now very different. In 1977 the Middleton family took eight Polecat-Ferrets to Inchmarnock to help to control the Rabbits. Five animals accidentally escaped in 1977 and 1978, and several young were seen during 1978, 1979 and 1980. The young Ferrets seen in 1978 could have come from an escaped pregnant female, but those seen in 1979 and 1980 establish genuine feral breeding. There is clearly an abundant food supply, so it will be interesting to trace the history of this small colony over the coming years.

Order ARTIODACTYLA

WILD GOAT *Capra hircus* L.

I am glad to say that the two small groups of Goats at the north end of Bute (*TBNHS* 20: 79) have once more been united into a single herd of some twelve animals. Moreover, from experiments conducted in gently herding the animals towards the fence it is clear that they can jump the fence without difficulty, so no future problems should arise.

Order RODENTIA

HOUSE-MOUSE *Mus musculus* L.

It now seems fairly certain that the House-Mouse is extinct on Inchmarnock. No specimen has been caught or seen since 1976.

Order CETACEA

PORPOISE *Phocoena phocoena* (L.)

One was washed ashore on Inchmarnock on 30th October 1978. It was apparently alive when washed ashore, but died very shortly afterwards.

References:

- GIBSON, J.A. (1970). The mammals of the Island of Bute. *Trans. Buteshire Nat. Hist. Soc.*, 18: 5-20.
GIBSON, J.A. (1976). Additional notes on the mammals of the Island of Bute. *Trans. Buteshire Nat. Hist. Soc.*, 20: 78-80.