

THE MAMMALS OF LOUGH CARRA

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Chris & Lynda Huxley

The varied habitats around Lough Carra hold the range of mammal species that might be expected to occur. As far as we are aware, there has been no systematic survey of any of these species, and so the following accounts are based on casual observations over the last eight years.

Two species have been added to the list since our last (2008) report: the Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris* and Natterer's Bat *Myotis nattereri* (see species accounts below).

Species list

Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>
Pygmy shrew	<i>Sorex minutus</i>
Lesser horseshoe bat	<i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i>
Whiskered bat	<i>Myotis mystacinus</i>
Natterer's bat	<i>Myotis nattereri</i>
Daubenton's bat	<i>M. daubentoni</i>
Leisler's bat	<i>Nyctalus leisleri</i>
Common pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>
Soprano pipistrelle	<i>P. pygmaeus</i>
Brown long-eared bat	<i>Plecotus auritus</i>
Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>
Irish hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>
Red squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>
Wood mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>
Brown rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>
Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>
Pine marten	<i>Martes martes</i>
Irish stoat	<i>Mustela erminea</i>
American mink	<i>M. vison</i>
Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>
Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>
Fallow deer	<i>Dama dama</i>
Feral goat	<i>Capra hircus</i>

Species accounts

Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus*

The hedgehog is present in some areas around the lake, but is likely to be less common where there are resident badgers (since it is known that badgers eat hedgehogs). Observations from the Carrajames area (in the catchment of the lough) suggest that the extremely harsh winters of 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 reduced the population of this species significantly.

Pygmy shrew *Sorex minutus*

The Pygmy shrew has been recorded occasionally in various habitats around the lakeshore. It is probably more widespread and abundant than casual observation suggests.

Lesser horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus hipposideros*

There is a thriving colony of this species living in the derelict buildings at Moorehall. They hibernate in the cellars in the main building, and the breeding site is in the small building to the north west of the main building. In summer, it is possible to watch them emerging in large numbers from this building through a first floor window.

Whiskered bat *Myotis mystacinus*

David Shaw-Smith informs that this species was recorded at Partry House estate in 1992. In addition, we have one further record at Castleburke: a female which gave birth while sitting on a boat in broad daylight!

Natterer's bat *Myotis nattereri*

One was identified at Moorehall (using a bat detector) by a group led by Tina Aughney of Bat Conservation Ireland in 2010

Daubenton's bat *Myotis daubentoni*

Recorded on the shoreline and over the water at Moorehall, using a "Batbox" bat detector. It is likely that this species occurs in other locations around the lake.

Leisler's bat *Nyctalus leisleri*

Recorded at Bridge Park on the Partry House Estate using a "Batbox" bat detector.

Common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

Recorded at several locations around the lake, using a “Batbox” bat detector.

Soprano pipistrelle *P. pygmaeus*

Recorded at several locations around the lake, using a “Batbox” bat detector.

Brown long-eared bat *Plecotus auritus*

Recorded at Cloonee, using a “Batbox” bat detector. Possible other records from Partry House Estate.

Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Rabbits have been widespread in suitable habitats in this area but apparently not very numerous. The population fluctuates considerably from one year to another (presumably as a result of myxomatosis). Our observations suggest that they have become much less numerous/widespread in recent years.

Irish hare *Lepus timidus*

This species occurs fairly commonly throughout the area, occupying several different habitats including woodland, scrub, grassland and fen.

Red squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*

This species appears to be present now in two localities (Partry House Estate and the Doon Peninsula), with evidence of their reappearance starting in 2010. We do not yet know if they are now permanently resident, but continued findings of characteristically cracked hazel nuts and a single sighting suggest that they might be.

Also, we are indebted to Jackie Donnelly of Bunree, Ballina, for the following account, based on information he received from Major Rutledge (who was resident at Cloonee for many years):

“It first appeared on Southern border of Mayo in 1883, but did not become plentiful there until many years later. About 1896, found at Cloonee on the shores of Lough Carra and after that they were well distributed throughout southern Mayo. Very numerous near Hollymount up to 1920 and near Cloonee up to about 1925. Found in wood at Partry on the west side of Lough Carra up to the end of 1940s.”

Wood mouse *Apodemus sylvaticus*

Recorded from many locations and presumably an abundant and widespread species.

Brown rat *Rattus norvegicus*

Recorded from several localities, this species is likely to occur throughout the area, especially where there are human habitations, farm buildings, etc.

Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

Widespread and fairly common throughout the area.

Pine marten *Martes martes*

Evidence of the presence of this species is common in the Partry House Estate, the Derrinrush peninsula, the Moorehall woodlands and on the Doon peninsula. In particular, the last location appears to harbour a comparatively dense population. It seems likely that the species is widespread and relatively abundant around the lakeshore as signs of its presence are regularly seen in many places. One local person ceased trying to trap mink (see below) as the traps were catching pine martens.

In late winter and spring, Pine martens in this area often feed on ivy berries, making their droppings very easy to identify as the distinctive seeds pass through them undigested.

Irish stoat *Mustela erminea*

This species is seen occasionally and is presumed to be widespread in the area, although it is difficult to assess its status in view of its secretive nature.

American mink *M. vison*

This introduced species has become a serious problem over the last twenty years or so, causing significant damage to populations of waterfowl. We believe that this has affected especially the moorhen and mallard populations, but probably also other duck species and coots. In addition, there has been evidence that they take trout from the spawning streams. Signs of the presence of mink are found throughout the area, along the lakeshore and on the islands. They are seen quite frequently and may sometimes be observed swimming across the lake to or from one of the islands.

Some “casual” (i.e. not systematic) trapping has been carried out from time to time, but there has been no formal or systematic attempt to control the population until very recently, when the National Parks and Wildlife Service hired a trapper to try to control the population. It seems unlikely that the breeding waterfowl populations will ever

recover to the levels recorded in the 1960s and 1970s unless such a systematic trapping programme to reduce (or eliminate) this damaging, invasive alien species is maintained over many years.

Badger *Meles meles*

There are several main badger setts in the area around the lake, with an apparently healthy population of breeding badgers. Occupied setts have been recorded on the Partry House Estate, the Derrinrush peninsula, the Kilkeeran peninsula, the Doon peninsula and at Moorehall. Signs of badgers are common in many other areas, suggesting that the population is widespread in most of the habitats.

Otter *Lutra lutra*

Otters certainly visit the lake itself on a regular basis. We have seen single individuals, and occasionally two together, and these sightings have become a little more frequent in 2007 and 2008. In addition, signs of their presence can be found from time to time around the lakeshore and on the islands. However, information received from those involved in the intensive research on the wildfowl in the 1960s and 1970s suggests that they are certainly not as numerous as they were then.

In 2007 and 2008, evidence was found that suggested that one or more otters were using the Castleburke/Ballintubber area regularly, so it is possible that they have bred, or attempted to breed, in this area.

Fallow deer *Dama dama*

This introduced species is spreading and becoming more numerous in various localities around the lake. There are substantial numbers in and adjacent to the Partry House Estate where they are causing significant damage to the woodland flora (see Lorraine Grimes' thesis in the "Habitats" section of this website). We believe that there may be up to thirty or more individuals using this area at any one time. They also occur on the Kilkeeran peninsula, at Moorehall and have been seen occasionally in other localities, including the Doon peninsula.

Some culling of the population is taking place, but there is insufficient to prevent an overall increase in numbers. The ecology of the habitats around the lake, especially the woodlands, is likely to be adversely affected to an increasing extent if the population is allowed to continue to expand.

Feral goat *Capra hircus*

There is a herd of about twenty feral goats living on the peninsula to the north of Port Royal. Their impact on the vegetation there is clearly seen by the distinct browse line on the woodland trees and shrubs and by the relative paucity of woodland ground flora.