

Eurasian Common Shrew

Sorex araneus

EcoRecord

the ecological database
for Birmingham and the Black Country

Species Fact Sheet



Photo © Jamie McMillan

Ecology

Common shrews are small and highly-active creatures with characteristic narrow pointed snouts, tiny eyes and three-tone fur.

They are insectivores with their diet being made up of earthworms, slugs, snails, insect larvae, woodlice and spiders. In order to survive they need a daily intake is 80 - 90% of body weight and lactating females require up to twice their body weight in food each day. Shrews have pointed teeth which are coloured red due to iron deposits concentrated in those parts of the teeth most subject to wear and help to harden the enamel.

Common shrews have one or occasionally two litters a year, usually of 6-7 young and their breeding season is April to August peaking in summer. Their life span is typically a year and a half, for those that do not succumb to infant mortality and about a third survive to breed.

They have poor vision and so rely on their olfactory, auditory and tactile senses.

Common shrews are active all day, but especially from dusk to dawn, though they spend most of their time underground and rarely leave thick cover. They are unlikely to be seen unless they are unintentionally trapped, though they can be heard relatively easily with their high-pitched call, from undergrowth at night. Occasionally dead individuals can be found, as the unpleasant-tasting carcasses are often left uneaten by predators.

Humane live-trapping of shrews is much trickier than trapping other small mammals as shrews are more likely to die in the process.

Habitat

Common shrews prefer moist and cool habitats with dense vegetation cover such as deciduous woodland, thick grass, bracken, hedgerows and bushy scrub and they can also be numerous in grassy roadside verges.

B&BC Distribution and Status

B&BC Status: Frequent



In Birmingham and the Black Country, records suggest that common shrews have a fairly wide distribution across the area, though the species is undoubtedly under-recorded due to the difficulty in finding such a small and elusive animal.

