

The Islay Natural History Trust's Checklist of the Mammals, Amphibians and Reptiles of Islay

The mammals, amphibians and reptiles occurring on Islay are limited in variety because it is an island, so there are no Moles, squirrels, Badgers, Foxes or Weasels. On the other hand, isolation has led to the development of two subspecies peculiar to Islay, of Common Shrew and Field Vole, while a third, the Stoat, has also been claimed, though is not widely accepted.

The following list gives brief status details for all the land and marine mammals, as well as for the amphibians and reptiles. Our information on several of these is far from complete and we would welcome records of all species. We particularly welcome records of whales, dolphins and porpoises, whether seen around our coasts and from the ferry.

Please use the attached recording form to let us have your observations.

MAMMALS

Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus*

Apparently introduced to Islay in the mid-1950s and again in the early 1970s. Now widespread.

Mole *Talpa europaea*

Does not occur naturally and has never been introduced. However, a single freshly-dead specimen was found near Loch Gorm in the early 1980s and has been assumed to have been carried to the island from the mainland in the crop of a large gull before being regurgitated.

Common Shrew *Sorex araneus*

A distinct race, *Sorex araneus granti*, occurs quite widely on Islay, distinguished from mainland shrews by its very grey flanks and different dentition.

Pygmy Shrew *Sorex minutus*

Found in most areas of the island, but more records needed.

Water Shrew *Neomys fodiens*

Recent records from the Rinns and Gruinart areas, but probably more widespread.

Natterer's Bat *Myotis nattereri*

Recorded for the first time in 1996, in the south-east of the island. Also seen on Jura in the same year.

Daubenton's Bat *Myotis daubentoni*

Recorded for the first time in summer 2001 and again in 2002, when at least one was identified, through the use of a bat detector, flying over the River Sorn at Bridgend.

Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

Found around several of the villages, but not common. The only small bat on Islay.

Common Long-eared Bat *Plecotus auritus*

The only common large bat on Islay. Only definitely recorded from Gruinart, Port Ellen and Kildalton.

Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Abundant; subject to periodic outbreaks of myxomatosis. Black and parti-coloured animals can be seen in some of the dune warrens.

Brown Hare *Lepus capensis*

Widespread and common in certain areas. Groups of 20 or 30, occasionally more, can be seen in spring, e.g. south of Bruichladdich, near Bridgend and at Gruinart. Variable in colour; gingery animals occur.

Mountain Hare *Lepus timidus* Error! Bookmark not defined.

Introduced, probably in 19th century, but now died out. Occurs on Jura where the Brown Hare is absent.

Field or Short-tailed Vole *Microtis agrestis*

Common and widespread, and subject to large fluctuations in numbers. They belong to a separate Islay race, *Microtus agrestis fiona*, which has a very dark brown ventral surface and distinct dentition, as compared to mainland voles.

Wood Mouse *Apodemus sylvaticus*

Widespread.

House Mouse *Mus musculus*

Widespread.

Common or Brown Rat *Rattus norvegicus*

Widespread and numerous, e.g. round farms and on the shore.

Minke Whale or Common Rorqual *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*

Seen regularly from ferries, both to Kennacraig and to Colonsay/Oban, headlands, e.g. MacArthur's Head, and in outer Loch Indaal. A number have been washed up dead, including at Machir Bay in Jun 1989 and at Saligo Bay in Jun 1990. In Jun 1991, a live one grounded in shallow water at Ardlarach, L.Indaal, but was successfully helped to turn round and was last seen heading south towards the outer part of the loch.

Sperm Whale *Physeter catodon*

At least three have been washed up dead in the last 20 years, the last, a large specimen over 15 m long, south of Saligo Bay in Mar 1994. Very rarely seen offshore.

Cuvier's Beaked Whale *Ziphius cavirostris*

A dead specimen of this rarely seen species came ashore in Saligo Bay in Mar 2002.

Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*

Very regularly seen from the ferry and from headlands. Occasionally washed up dead.

Killer Whale *Orcinus orca*

Wide ranging offshore and in outer L.Indaal. Seen occasionally close inshore, e.g. off Port Wemyss and Portnahaven.

Pilot Whale *Globicephala melaena*

Occasional sightings offshore, including pod of 20–25 off the south coast in Apr 1998. A few specimens have been washed ashore in last 20 years, including two near Kintra, one sometime before 1985, the second in Mar 1990.

Risso's Dolphin *Grampus griseus*

Four groups of two to six seen passing Frenchman's Rocks in Jun or Jul 1993, 1994 and 1996. One found dead in L.Gruinart in Sep 1994.

White-sided Dolphin *Lagenorhynchus albirostris*

One found dead at Ardnave, end-Oct, only record.

Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus*

Small numbers fairly regularly seen from ferry and round island in 1980s and early 1990s, then from 1996 to 2001, a party of 5–15 (occasionally 20+) began to be seen regularly in Loch Indaal, coming right into the inner part, Port Ellen Bay and Sound of Islay, at first only in summer but then all year, often very close to shore.

Striped (or Blue-white) Dolphin *Stenella caeruleoalba*

Two were found dead in Aug 1992, one in L.Indaal, the other at Machir Bay. At the time they were the third and fourth records for Scotland, though there have been more since.

Common Dolphin *Delphinus delphis*

Occasionally seen offshore. Two washed up dead after severe gale in Sep 1990, one at Machir Bay, the other at Sanaigmore Bay.

Stoat *Mustela erminea*

Widespread. The Islay Stoat has been described as a separate race, *Mustela erminea ricinae*, based on smaller size and minor differences in head measurements, but this is not widely accepted. Despite the lack of snow on Islay, many of our Stoats turn white in winter.

Ferret *Mustela furo*

Ferrets have been released or escaped on the island and are common and widespread, particularly in the rabbit warrens. They occur in two main colour types, either yellowy-white all over or brown with bold dark and light markings on the head, when they resemble Polecats, which, however, have never occurred here.

Otter *Lutra lutra*

Found round the coasts, up the rivers and burns, and in inland lochs, and probably as common on Islay as anywhere in Scotland. They are usually shy and easily disturbed, but quiet watching overlooking undisturbed stretches of the coast will often reveal them.

Mink *Mustela vison*

Unfortunately, escaped Mink from the mainland of Argyll have been turning up in recent years on Islay, presumably swimming here, via Jura.

Cat *Felis* (domestic)

Feral cats occur in a number of areas, especially in the larger rabbit warrens. The genuine Wild Cat has never occurred on Islay.

Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*

Breeds on Nave Island and can be seen hauled out on the sandbanks in Loch Gruinart, and also on the islands opposite Portnahaven, occasionally coming right into the harbour there.

Common Seal *Phoca vitulina*

Several hundreds occur round the coasts, especially from Ardbeg eastwards, but they are also found in Loch Indaal, hauled out on the skerries south of Bowmore.

Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*

A population of some thousands is present, mainly on the hills in the east and north, but there are up to 100 on the Rinns, especially round the RSPB Loch Gruinart reserve.

Fallow Deer *Dama dama*

Only occurs in the south-east of the island, from about Lagavulin eastwards, where it is quite numerous.

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

Widespread and common on the low ground and in the forestry plantations, usually in ones or twos.

Goat *Capra* (domestic)

Feral Goats are well established on the Oa and around the west and north coasts. A census in 1985 revealed at least 250.

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

The island list of reptiles and amphibians is a very short one. Only four species are definitely on Islay, with a fifth, the Slow-worm, on Jura, while it is possible that Great Crested Newt is here, but there are no confirmed records.

Great Crested (or Warty) Newt *Triturus cristatus*

Possibly occurs; please keep a look out.

Common Toad *Bufo bufo*

Widespread and common. Among important breeding sites are Lochs nan Giol, Tallant and Conailbhe.

Common Frog *Rana temporaris*

Widespread and locally abundant.

Common (or Viviparous) Lizard *Lacerta vivipara*

Widespread, though not common.

Adder *Vipera berus*

The only snake on Islay. It is widely distributed, but believed to have declined in recent years.

Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis*

This species occurs on Jura, but not on Islay.

