

THE MAMMALS OF ISLAY

Extracted (and updated) from 'The Birds of Islay' (2003) by Malcolm Ogilvie

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, of Common Shrew and Field Vole, peculiar to Islay while a third, of Stoat, has also been claimed, though is not widely accepted.

The following list gives brief status details for all the land mammals, plus cetaceans and seals. Information on several of these is far from complete and records of all species are welcome, particularly records of whales, dolphins and porpoises, whether seen around the coasts and from the ferry.

Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus*

Apparently introduced to Islay in the mid-1950s and again in the early 1970s. Now widespread and frequently seen as a road casualty.

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 only from the Rinns and Gruinart areas, but probably more widespread than this.

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, where now reported as regular.

Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

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

Common Long-eared Bat *Plecotus auritus*

The most common medium to large bat on Islay. Only definitely recorded from Gruinart, Port Ellen and Kildalton, but very probably occurs elsewhere.

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 20–30, 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*

Introduced, probably in 19th century, but did not survive well and has now died out, with no definite sighting for at least 50 years, probably much longer. Occurs on Jura where the Brown Hare is absent.

Field or Short-tailed Vole *Microtus 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 the voles on the mainland.

Wood Mouse *Apodemus sylvaticus*

Widespread. Comes into houses more than the House Mouse.

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, to Kennacraig and to Colonsay/Oban, headlands, e.g. MacArthur's Head, and in outer L.Indaal. Some have been washed up dead.

Sperm Whale *Physeter catodon*

At least five have been washed up dead in the last 20 years, one, 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 oceanic species came ashore in Saligo Bay in Mar 2002 and two further ones in 2007.

Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*

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.

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. Seen occasionally off the coast.

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. Now less regular but still see in, e.g., Sound of Islay and Loch Indaal.

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 including one washed up dead in Loch Gruinart in July 2014.

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. There were also two washed up dead in Loch Indaal in winter 2014-15.

Stoat *Mustela erminea*

Widespread. It has been described as a separate race, *Mustela erminea ricinae*, based on smaller size and minor differences in head measurements, but 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 occur quite widely, particularly in the rabbit warrens, as well as being killed on the roads. 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 can be fairly shy, but quiet watching overlooking undisturbed stretches of the coast will often reveal them.

Mink *Mustela vison*

Unfortunately, occasional 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 (up to 100 pups are born each Oct–Nov) 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*

Occurs round the coasts, especially from Ardbeg eastwards where counts of up to 800 have been made. Also commonly in L.Indaal, hauled out on the skerries south of Bowmore. Less frequent elsewhere.

Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*

A population of a few thousand is present, mainly on the hills in the east and north, with up to 100 or more on the Rinns.

Fallow Deer *Dama dama*

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

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

Widespread and common on the low ground and in the conifer plantations.

Goat *Capra* (domestic)

Feral Goats are well established on the Oa and around the west and north coasts. A census in 2005 revealed at least 700.

THE REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS OF ISLAY

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 absolutely definite records.

Great Crested (or Warty) Newt *Triturus cristatus*

Possibly occurs; please keep a look out.

Palmate newt *Lissotriton helveticus*

Recorded near Smaull a few years ago. Could be quite widespread and definitely needs looking out for.

Common Toad *Bufo bufo*

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

Common Frog *Rana temporaria*

Widespread and locally abundant. Starts spawning in Feb in mild years.

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.