

Harvest Mice and other small mammals.

At the March meeting of the Blyth Valley and Southwold SWT wildlife group, Geoffrey Abbot gave a fascinating talk about small mammals. Much of his research comes from the Flatford Mill area, which has a wide diversity of habitats - arable fields, woodland, hedges, grassland and marshes.

Pride of place goes to the charming Harvest mouse, with its attractive russet fur above, and white below. It is the only mouse with a prehensile tail that it can wrap around twigs and grasses. Their spherical, woven nests are barely a foot or so above ground, and they thrive in areas where wild plants grow in amongst crops. Other mice – house, field, wood, marsh and pygmy and dormice – are all present, utilising different habitats in the area. Other species were discussed. Bank and field voles are present in good numbers, and both voles and mice can swim if need be in the tidal areas of the marshes. If you've ever wondered why your cat doesn't eat shrews, it's because of scent glands that emit distasteful odours. Moles are highly specialised. Their tunnels act as giant worm traps, as worms fall into the spaces. It is an area rich in these small creatures, and both Tawny and Barn Owls benefit from the variety of creatures to predate.

We all enjoyed the wide range of photographs, and learning about the sensitivity with which the surveys are conducted.

Our next meeting is on Thursday, April 21st, 7.30 in the Southwold Arts Centre, IP18 6JP. We have a brief AGM, with wine and snacks, followed by a film, "Secret Rivers – the Blyth", featuring Paul Heiney. Free admission.