

## How to Find Small Mammals in Your Back Garden

Watching and photographing small mammals can be great fun, and it's highly likely you could find some of them living in your own back garden.

There are ten species in the UK; Bank voles, field voles, Wood mice, House mice, Yellow-necked mice, Harvest mice, Water shrews, Common shrews, Pygmy shrews and Dormice. There's plenty of them, but spotting them can be real tricky.



**Above:** Bank Vole. Could one of these furry characters be living in your garden?

For one thing they're very small, and move very fast, so they can be easily overlooked, especially when they move beneath the cover of vegetation. They're also very secretive. They need to be, because they are on the menu of predators like weasels, foxes and birds of prey. If you want to increase your chances of finding them you need to stack the odds in your favour... or as I prefer to do... cheat!

Get yourself a 'Longworth Trap'. There are plenty of humane mouse traps on the market, but if you want the best, get yourself a Longworth. I've been using one for years and it works like magic. It's caught dozens of mice and voles, and on one occasion I caught two wood mice in one go, as they both went into the trap at the same time.



**Above:** A Longworth Trap. Mammal watching doesn't have to be difficult!



**Above:** This is our smallest mammal, a Pygmy shrew. If you want to trap these little critters you need to be licensed.

No special training is needed before you use a Longworth trap, and they're very easy to set up, but a good deal of responsibility is required. Small mammals need to feed frequently, and if they stay trapped for too long they can die of stress, heat loss and dehydration/starvation. For this reason you need to check your trap every three to four hours to see if you've caught something. If you have, examine it, or photograph it, with a minimum amount of handling, and then release it pronto.

If you want to trap shrews in the UK you'll need a special licence from English Nature, the Countryside Council for Wales or Scottish Natural Heritage, so to keep things legal, and to make your trap shrew-safe, you can drill a 12mm. hole in the nest chamber which will allow shrews to escape. A metal washer should be glued around the hole with 'Araldite' to prevent gnawing by rodents. If you've ever had a Wood mouse in your home you'll know they can easily chew through most materials including metal.

Before you set the trap you obviously need to put some bait inside. I normally use a mix of sunflower seeds and crushed peanuts. It's also important to put some bedding material in the nest chamber to keep the animals warm.

When you position your trap make sure the nest chamber is raised slightly at the rear. This allows any moisture to run out and prevents the bedding material from getting damp.

You'll find that most small mammals are great high jumpers, so when you're checking the contents of the trap it's a good idea to put the whole thing inside a large clear plastic bag. This is also an ideal way to view the animals if you don't wish to handle them.

## EQUIPMENT GUIDE

- Longworth humane traps
- Small mammal fold-out ID charts
- Shire book of Mice of the British Isles

All available at the UK Safari Nature Shop:

[www.uksafari.com/shop](http://www.uksafari.com/shop)



**Above:** Once it's in position, cover your trap with vegetation to insulate the nest chamber



**Above:** When you see the trap door closes it's time to see what's inside



**Above:** To prevent your catch escaping open the trap inside a large plastic bag



**Above:** If you like your wildlife up close then small mammal trapping is for you