autumn 2009

the dormouse monitor

the newsletter of the national dormouse monitoring programme

people's trust for **endangered species**

INSIDE

Welcome

Welcome to the autumn 2009 edition of *The Dormouse Monitor*. This year seems to have been much better for dormice than the last two - we're still waiting for some nest box check results to come in but a quick glance shows great numbers at many sites. At our own wood on the Isle of Wight this October we found just over 140 animals - a fantastic result.

Thanks to all of you who have been entering your records online - we have over 350 site visits on there now. We are hoping to expand the site next year so that each of your sites will display graphs and year-on-year results.

We also have almost 40 records of dormice reported in the National Dormouse Database section of the website. We haven't incorporated these into the national map yet but we're hoping that they mean we have almost 40 new sites where we didn't know dormice existed previously.

And on that note - we've had dormouse-chewed nuts from 50 sites in the third *Great Nut Hunt* already - please carry out a nut hunt if you haven't already.

Best wishes

Nida Al Fulaij (nida@ptes.org) & Susan Sharafi (susan@ptes.org)

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Image credit correction - sincerest apologies to Dave Bevan who kindly supplied the front cover image for the last edition of *The Dormouse Monitor* which was wrongly credited.

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The Dormouse Monitor is compiled by Nida Al Fulaij & Susan Sharafi.

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Reconnecting the Countryside winners

Last year we launched our first *Reconnecting the Countryside* competition to reward the conservation efforts made by the farming and landowning community to protect and restore our hedgerows and woodlands and safeguard native wildlife. Keith Allen from Monmouthshire, one of our NDMP monitors, won the overall prize. The judges were impressed by Keith's clear vision for the wider landscape. He had connected up the largest continuous stretch of dormouse friendly habitat (over 200 hectares in total) of all the entries, planted and managed his hedgerows and at the same time worked in close collaboration with his neighbours. Three runners-up were also announced, including one of Keith Allen's farming neighbours, Alan Morgan, also from Monmouthshire; together with Bob and Anne Cowlin from Assington, Suffolk and Antony Martin from Lydden, near Dover in Kent.

The judges visited each of the six farms shortlisted in the competition and each of the entrants were required to demonstrate how they had improved habitat connectivity and created continuous cover of dormouse friendly habitat through planting, coppicing and/or filling in gaps in existing hedges and woodlands, and managing them in a sensitive manner. Both new and established woodland and hedgerows were taken into account in the assessment, providing that in the long-term the newer habitat will become suitable to support dormouse populations. Entrants were also encouraged to join forces with neighbouring landowners in order to maximise habitat connectivity.

The standard of entries was high and it was a tough call to decide on a winner, but Keith Allen truly stood out. Not only did he succeed in creating the most dormouse friendly habitat (including creating hazel staging posts along hedgerows and an aerial bridge across a road) but he also demonstrated a tremendous dedication to working in partnership with others to maximise the benefit for local wildlife populations, as well as acting as a local dormouse monitor and taking part in the training of dormouse volunteers. He is an inspiration for farmers and landowners showing it is possible to make a huge impact through a relatively modest investment of time and effort. A very worthy winner.

When we asked Keith how he felt about the award he said: "I have learnt how precarious is the existence of the dormouse and, with the encouragement of PTES and Gwent Wildlife Trust, I am doing all I can to help preserve it, and other endangered species. The prize money will enable me to purchase dormouse monitoring equipment and a special camera system to film dormice and thus try to further understand how we humans can best help them."

To enter our *Reconnecting the Countryside* competition in 2010 please email Nida@ptes.org or Jim@ptes.org for an application form, guidelines and entry pack. Deadline for entries is Friday 14th May 2010.

Anne & Bob Cowlin (above), Alan Morgan (left), Antony Martin (below) and Keith Allen (bottom) were all commended for their work creating wildlife friendly habitat.

ALL IMAGES PTES

Dormouse gestation periods

"An unusual occurrence took place during our nest box checks this year. On 22nd August we checked box 23 and found a female who had just – was even in the process of – giving birth. As we weighed her (18.5g) we saw that she was lactating and placed her back in the nest quickly. We did not remove the young or even count them, as we were certain they had only just been born. We noticed that the mother had lost half her tail.

When we went back on 19th September we found three lively juveniles in box 23 – weighing in at 11g each – but no mother. However in box 38, just 70 yards away from box 23, we found the female with the short tail, again in the process of producing young. She weighed 28g, was lactating and, although I didn't remove the young, I saw at least two newborn dormice in the nest with her.

The gestation period of dormice is given as 23 days – which means that this female got pregnant approximately five days after giving birth last time. Has anything like this been recorded before – either in the wild or in the captive breeding programme?"

John Harling, Canterbury, Kent

Paul Bright replies,

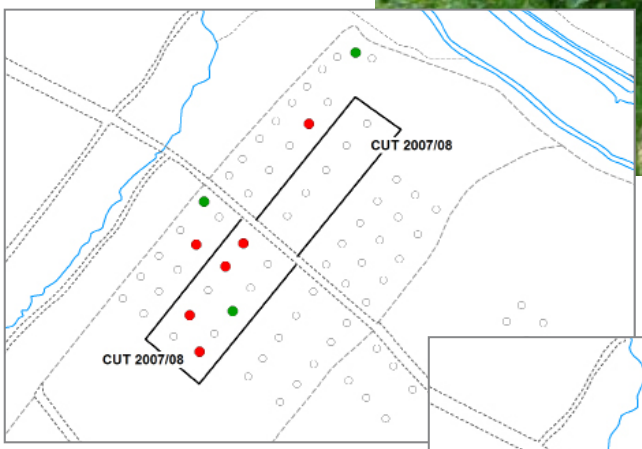
"There is just a chance it was not the same female with a short tail at the two checks. Asdell's Patterns of Mammalian Reproduction *doesn't mention this in relation to Muscardinus, but rats (and mice are similar) have short oestrous cycles of four or five days so the observation is perfectly possible assuming the Gliridae are like other rodents."*

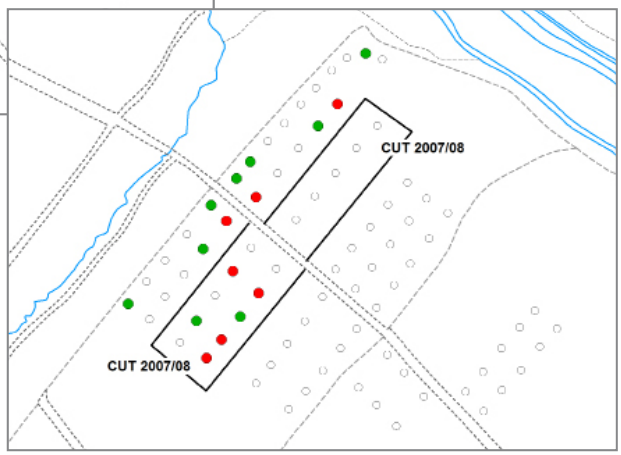
Nest boxes on stakes in coppiced wood

Ian White and I have discussed many times the best ways to monitor how quickly dormice colonise areas of newly cut coppice. In September 2008 we decided to do a little experiment at our woodland reserve on the Isle of Wight. The total area is 159 hectares (ha) of which 100ha are semi natural ancient woodland and 15ha are newly planted broadleaf. We currently have 450 boxes up in various copses throughout our reserve and this year found over 140 dormice in the October box check which averaged out to 3.1 dormice per 10 boxes. We put up 15 nest boxes on wooden stakes in two areas 0.5ha each that had been coppiced during the winter of 2007/08.

We checked these new boxes on our regular checks in October 2008 and found no evidence of dormice. In May and June 2009 the boxes were still empty. However in September we were delighted to discover that dormice were using five of the 15 boxes! In October that number had increased further. Six boxes contained nests, four of which were occupied by adult dormice ranging from 16-22g in weight. This was great news. Not only that the boxes had become occupied so quickly but also that the percentage of boxes occupied was so high. We will keep you updated following further box checks.

Laura Hurt
Conservation Officer PTES





ABOVE: The two 0.5ha areas marked out were coppiced over two consecutive winters. Dormouse nests were found in four boxes (red dots) and one dormouse was found (green dot).

RIGHT: The same area was checked again in October 2009 and even more nests (red dots) and dormice (green dots) were found in the area.

MAPS & PHOTO PTES

A tribute to Warren Cresswell (1962-2009)

Warren Cresswell set up and ran Cresswell Associates, one of the largest ecological consultancies in the south west, where he spent much time and effort trialling and putting into place safeguards for dormice. Tragically Warren died suddenly in November 2009.

"*Warren Cresswell was one of our best students at Royal Holloway, graduating with a First in 1983. He was also one of the nicest people I have ever known, in spite of the dent he put in the side of my car. I had employed him to help with radio tracking hedgehogs, but he arrived late one evening, driving too fast and skidded on some wet grass. His fellow students pulled his leg about it for months afterwards.*

Warren was one of those people who always seemed happy and excited with whatever he was doing, except for his spell as a trainee manager at Marks & Spencer. They had recruited him as 'promising material', but after a few weeks in charge of socks and underwear he pleaded almost tearfully to be given an escape route back into zoology. We steered him to Bristol where he joined a team of PhD students there. He went on to create Cresswell Associates one of the largest groups of ecological advisors in the country. Despite the commercial need to focus on paid work, Warren maintained a keen interest in research. He tried to monitor the effects of habitat management. This doesn't earn much money, but Warren was always keen to know that what he was doing and advising was soundly based. In particular he experimented with transplanting hazel stools and tree stumps to recreate dormouse habitat with less delay than waiting for planted saplings to mature. He also experimented with dormouse bridges, helping to draw attention to the dangers of habitat fragmentation for this and many other species. He shared what he learned by contributing to conferences, setting an excellent example for others to follow. We have lost a fine companion and an unassuming, but effective leader among his generation of biologists."

Pat Morris
Former lecturer Royal Holloway, Unviersity of London

"*Warren Cresswell was a dedicated mammalogist whose postgraduate work was on badgers. After spending far too many long cold winter nights radio tracking his target mammal, he cast around for another species. When he found the dormouse, a protected species that hibernated throughout the winter, he latched onto it with enthusiasm. Based on his expertise, Cresswell Associates carried out a number of significant projects involving dormice. The mitigation for one, on the M2 in Kent, led to a joint paper with his wife, Stephanie Wray, and a presentation at an American conference in North Carolina. Cresswell Associates has been involved in several road schemes with one, at Chievely, being noted for the particular success of its translocation.*

Warren was especially concerned to ensure that dormice could cross roads safely and there are a number of locations, especially in South Wales, where his trial dormouse bridges can be seen. We also experimented with captive bred animals, in particular to find out how far they would travel and through what sized tube. He was always keen to pass on his knowledge and experience: the tube experiments resulted in a paper at a Mammal Society symposium while results of more recent work on dormice in relation to the forthcoming Ryder Cup were presented at the International Dormouse Conference in 2008. Not only that but he also gave up the Sunday afternoon of the conference weekend to spend it in a Somerset quarry explaining to the delegates how a wire mesh tube dormouse crossing might work.

Unsurprisingly Cresswell Associates were asked to produce the second edition of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges *while Warren sat round a table in London with a number of us hammering out the fine details of the second edition of Natural England's* Dormouse Conservation Handbook. *We were both witnesses for the prosecution in a dormouse court case in Wales but, to our huge frustration, failed to persuade the District Judge, who allowed no room for doubt that there were no certainties with wildlife. While many of us mourn the sad loss of a good friend, mammals in general, and dormice in particular, have lost a real champion.*"

Michael Woods
Michael Woods Associates

PTES & CRESSWELL ASSOCIATES

Warren doing what he did best - explaining how some facility might just work to solve a mammal problem that we had created. Here he's talking to the delegates at the International Dormouse Conference about dormouse bridges.

Romanian dormice in Transylvania

In autumn 2006 we reported on the work that Eliana Sevianu and her colleagues had been carrying out in Romania on the European species of dormice. Since then PTES has continued to fund her work looking into the ecology and conservation of dormice in Transylvania.

Transylvania covers the central part of Romania, a territory of approximately 100,000 km^2, almost half the entire country. To evaluate the presence and distribution of dormice across the region, the team targeted several sites trying to cover as much surface area as possible. They put up nest boxes in birch and coniferous forests, types of habitat that were not studied in the previous project, and also rocky limestone areas. Putting the boxes up in grids and marking their position with GPS enabled Eliana to assess the population densities of the different species but was also very time consuming. Live trapping was also used to gather data about species' abundance, reproduction and seasonal activity.

Listening for night calls was a good method for detecting the presence of the edible dormouse (*Glis glis)*, especially during the mating season. However, they found that this method could only be used for abundance estimates in forests that were easy to walk through at night time. The presence of hazel dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius)* was also determined using nut hunts and looking for natural nests – predominantly in shrubby areas - whilst the only reliable field sign left by the forest dormouse (*Dryomys nitedula*) is arboreal nests, which the team looked for. They also collected owl pellets.

Whilst carrying out the field work the group spoke to the locals and found a widespread lack of knowledge about the presence or existence of all the dormouse species. Unfortunately, this was also true for forest rangers. The team engaged the forest rangers in all the areas where they set traps or searched for pellets and found that the forest ranger was either completely unaware of dormice or that they recognised the edible and/or the hazel dormouse from photographs but thought they were squirrels or mice. Consequently the team constantly tried to improve the situation through educational and awareness-raising activities.

Hazel, forest and edible dormouse remains were all found in the owl pellets collected during the project. Analysing the skeletal remains showed that the most abundant and widely spread species was the hazel dormouse and the least abundant was the forest dormouse. These results corresponded well

ALL PHOTOS ELIANA SEVIANU & TEAM

ABOVE LEFT: The team put radio transmitters on forest, edible and hazel dormice and tracked them to find out more about their habits.

ABOVE RIGHT: Eliana's team worked across the Transylvanian landscape monitoring the dormice using nest boxes and marking their location using GPS.

LEFT & FAR LEFT: Hazel dormice (and their nests in shrubby areas) were the most often found species of the three dormice in the area.

with the results obtained previously by the team in the Transylvanian Plain.

On collating the results Eliana found that hazel dormice were present from low altitudes, in deciduous forests (oak, hornbeam and birch) and up to 1,700m in mixed and coniferous forests. One individual was captured in a dwarf pine alpine area of the Retezat Mountains. The hazel dormouse was the most widely spread dormouse species in Transylvania. Edible dormice were also found to be a widespread species whilst the forest dormouse had a more limited distribution.

As well as looking at the distribution of all these species, the project sought to determine species' abundance using various methods. The densities of edible dormouse populations ranged between four to 13 individuals per hectare, with an average density of ten animals per hectare. Taking this estimation into account with the forest patch sizes the species could be considered viable in the long term. The populations' size and density were influenced by the forest structure: food and nest-site availability, and also by altitude. The highest density of animals was found in lowland, deciduous forests, with a well developed shrub layer. Although edible dormice were widely spread throughout Transylvania, their presence was strictly linked to the existence of forests, so this species' distribution was more limited than that of hazel dormice which lived in shrubby areas as well as woodlands.

The density of hazel and forest dormice were estimated using live-trapping and searching for nests. The results showed that hazel dormice density ranged from one to five individuals per hectare, lower than that of the edible dormouse, whilst forest dormice had the most limited distribution and the lowest population densities of less than one individual per hectare to three individuals per hectare. Based on these findings, Eliana has concluded that hazel dormice are vulnerable in Transylvania, whilst the forest dormouse is the most threatened dormouse species in the project area.

The garden dormouse (*Eliomys quercinus*) is found throughout Romania but was not detected in Transylvania by Eliana during the first part of her project. So they increased their efforts in trying to find records of it this time. Reports existed from the late nineteenth century with sporadic reports from the last 100 years. Many areas where older records had come from have changed significantly, in particular where the forest cover has been greatly reduced. After live-trapping in many different types of habitat from areas where the species had been previously recorded – and chasing up a claim of a live sighting which turned out to be a forest dormouse instead of a garden dormouse - the team concluded that the species has indeed disappeared from the area or possibly had never been present in Transylvania in the first place.

Eliana and her team also looked into the ecology and habits of the different species throughout the study area. They found that the edible dormouse hibernates from October until May, with slightly later emergence in spring at higher altitudes. The species reproduced once a year, every year during their monitoring, with most of the births occurring during August, with the juveniles being independent by September. The mean litter size was five and both males and females were capable of reproducing after their first hibernation. On average their animals were living to five years old. Hazel dormice were hibernating from November until April, having a longer activity season than edible dormice. At higher altitudes (around 1,500m) up in the mountains, the activity period was shorter, from June to September, due to the colder temperature which lessened the availability of food. This species had an almost continuous reproduction season from May (possibly April) until October. In the lowlands (but not up in the mountains) they recorded several cases of females with two litters during one season and a mean litter size of four young. Forest dormice hibernated between October

Romanian dormice in Transylvania cont.

ABOVE: Edible dormice were found to produce one litter a year, every year of the study.

LEFT: Hazel dormice were active for a longer period than the other species.

BELOW: Edible dormice lived on average for five years in the study area.

ALL PHOTOS ELIANA SEVIANU & TEAM

and April. During the active season, the species reproduced only once a year, with young being born from May to June and having a mean litter size of four young.

The biggest threat for all three dormice species in Romania is forest management. Unfortunately for biodiversity conservation, it is quite easy to obtain a permit to clear cut forest for development purposes including road construction, residential homes and industrial use. Logging is also a big problem, even in protected areas like national parks, which are administrated by the National Forest Authority. Eliana tried to get one of their study sites protected status: a mature, oak forest on the Husuierului Valley. Unfortunately, in the summer of 2007, before they had the chance to complete the documentation and administration, the wood fell foul of extensive logging activities, part of a ten year plan to selectively log old, valuable oak trees, exactly the kind of forest management they had been hoping to protect the area from. More encouragingly last year, in Romania, there were many sites designated as Natura 2000 sites, including some protected forest habitats, but unfortunately dormice are still not listed in Annex II which is defined as, "Animal and plant species of community interest whose conservation requires the designation of special areas of conservation."

Eliana concludes that they, "will try to designate a protected area for the conservation of dormice in the future and hopes that our conservation, educational and raising awareness efforts will lead to results in the medium and long term and that all dormice species will have a secured future in Transylvania."

Can ecological theories aid nut hunts?

Optimal foraging theories are based on the idea that animals will use their time and energy efficiently when they are searching for food. I wondered whether these could help us predict which hazel trees dormice are more likely to feed in when they have a choice. If so, this might enable us to design more efficient dormouse surveys when searching for hazel nuts. This could further our knowledge of dormouse distribution, a principal aim of the UK Biodiversity Partnership.

Dormice are likely to spend more time eating at optimal feeding localities, thereby producing a larger volume of feeding remains. If we concentrate our searches at such places this should increase the probability of detecting dormouse presence.

I recorded the number of dormouse gnawed hazel nut shells and 14 environmental variables from 100 sample plots across ten study sites in Surrey and Kent (including nine NDMP woodlands). I also noted where nuts were found under the canopy within three zones ("near" – within 100cm of the tree trunk; "mid" – the 100cm beneath the middle of the canopy; and "far" – the 100cm beneath the canopy edge) to see where it would be most effective to search, and made a note of the time it took to find the first 'dormouse' nut.

Alternative food plant diversity was not a significant determiner of the uneven dormouse nut distribution. However, I did find that the larger the tree (measured as stool diameter at chest height) the more dormouse gnawed hazel nuts were found; although interestingly the total number of nut shells (whether or not eaten by dormice) was not related to tree size . Also there was no link between the total number of hazel nut shells (i.e. those uneaten and those eaten by birds, squirrels and other rodents) and the number of these that were eaten by dormice.

Overall, 85% (111) of dormouse gnawed hazel nut shells were recorded beneath trees with a stool diameter at chest height greater than 170cm and 98.5% were recorded under trees which had a stool diameter greater than 150cm. This means that it isn't worth searching under trees less than five feet in diameter at chest height.

Where nuts are present, you soon find them. In all of the quadrats that yielded dormouse gnawed hazel nut shells, the first was recorded within two minutes of starting.

PTES

The total number of hazel nut shells recorded (i.e. uneaten and those eaten by all species) beneath each tree canopy did not differ significantly across the two outer nut survey zones. However, the number of dormouse gnawed hazel nut shells recorded from the inside survey zones was significantly different.

My study showed that dormice feed on hazel nuts from large hazel trees and that more feeding remains are found within 100cm of a hazel tree trunk.

Large hazel trees might be favoured by dormice because they can get the maximum amount of energy due to a greater abundance of food, including both hazel nuts and insect prey, so are key places for foraging. Larger trees are also likely to provide more nesting opportunities and may therefore provide safe places to feed, reducing the risk of predation in a place where food is abundant. It should be possible to test these theories and I made some recommendations as to how this should be done in my thesis.

For future nut hunts I recommend the following practises:

- focus survey effort on trees which have a stool diameter at chest height of more than 150cm
- focus survey effort within 100cm of the trunk of these hazel trees
- search a maximum of ten of these trees in a site - at each tree, if no dormouse gnawed hazel nut shells are found within five minutes then move on to the next tree

To contribute to this research whilst taking part in the third *Great Nut Hunt,* when you find a dormouse nut, simply record the diameter at chest height of the nearest hazel tree and the distance from the trunk where the nut was found. You'll find a form to fill in on www.greatnuthunt.co.uk

Jonathan Vaughan
jonathan.vaughan@mouchel.com

This work is from the author's dissertation completed as part of the MSc in Biological Recording at the University of Birmingham, under the supervision of Dr Johnny Birks.

New booklet on woodland management

PTES is often asked by small holders and woodland workers about the key management practices that would benefit dormice. Laura Hurt and Ian White have produced a really useful reference booklet on the key messages that will aid dormouse conservation in small blocks of woodland.

Woodlands in the 21st century remain important for timber production, for their amenity value and as a habitat for wildlife. Unfortunately, inappropriate, or lack of, management has meant that many of our woods are losing their botanical diversity and their associated fauna. Furthermore, changes in farmland practices have meant that many of our hedgerows are no longer appropriately managed, which has led to them becoming degraded or disappearing altogether in many areas. Consequently, many of our woodlands have become increasingly isolated within the landscape.

This leaflet is aimed at owners of woodlands up to about ten hectares who might not have had any experience of woodland management and who are not working with professional woodland managers, ecologists or foresters. It is specifically intended to promote management practices that will either maintain or enhance the habitat for our native hazel dormouse and to give guidance relating to the European Habitats Directive.

The management options that are detailed in the leaflet are based on four main principles: open up the canopy, encourage a diverse understorey, retain dead and decaying wood and keep areas of woodland well-linked. These principles, whilst good for dormice, should also benefit a range of other species. Even if you cannot tackle all these activities doing a little to help is better than nothing so don't be discouraged!

Open up the canopy

Opening up the canopy by felling some trees has numerous benefits for wildlife. It allows light to reach the woodland floor encouraging plants, wildflowers and eventually a scrubby understorey to develop. This provides food for many insects, birds and mammals. Don't fell veteran trees as these are very valuable for wildlife. Aim for holes in the canopy of between 10m x 10m and 20m x 20m. Smaller gaps will not provide enough light for regeneration (except at the wood edge or ride-side) and larger ones may encourage deer or affect the connectivity within a small site. In some cases a tree felling licence will be required. For further advice please see www.forestry.gov.uk.

Maintain arboreal connectivity within your wood and externally

Try to maintain a continuous connection between shrubs and trees throughout your wood to enable dormice, which are largely arboreal and reluctant to come to the ground, access to areas of suitable habitat even on neighbouring land. You can also retain brash, bramble and bracken across felling areas.

Key messages:

- Allowing light to reach the woodland floor in places helps the understorey to grow and provides food for dormice.
- A diversity of plant species as well as a mosaic of different ages and structures is important in woodland.
- Keeping areas of habitat well-linked enables wildlife to move from one to the other (when an area becomes less suitable) to access different food sources and nesting sites.
- Your woodland may not contain all of these features but neighbouring woodlands might contain those that are missing.
- Try to consider your woodland as part of the wider landscape.

Managing small woods for dormice is produced by PTES with co-funding from Natural England. For a copy of the booklet or to pass one onto the owner of the NDMP site you monitor please email Laura@ptes.org.

Year planner

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Felling												
Coppicing												
Ride widening & glade creation												
Mow half of ride annually												
Planting												
Dormouse survey - nut hunt												
Dormouse survey - place nest tubes												
Dormouse survey - check nest tubes												
Plan winter work												

PAUL MANCHESTER

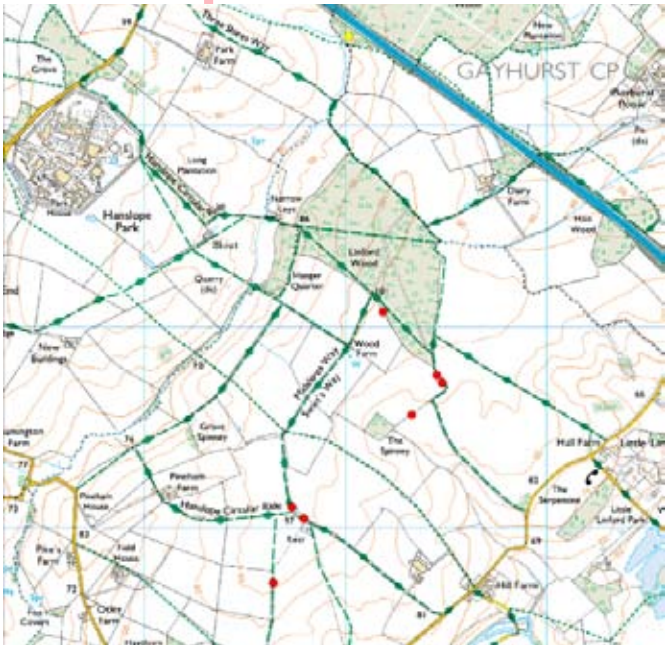
Little Linford Wood wood update

In 1998 dormice were released at Little Linford Wood which, though isolated, is not peaceful, as traffic on the M1 roars past 500m to the north. This does not seem to have deterred the local dormice who have now made their own journey to picnic by the side of the motorway.

Little Linford Wood was the fourth wood where dormice were released. The woodland, owned by Berks, Bucks and Oxford Wildlife Trust, has a dense understory of hazel and blackthorn and is managed by a Wildlife Trust Volunteer Warden, Phil Sarre, and an enthusiastic team of local volunteers.

The dormice clearly liked their new home. The 41 that were released had increased to 55 by the October check of 2000 and a whopping 117 by September 2004. In 2008 numbers dropped to 22 in September and 15 in October. But a local hedge survey undertaken by Michael Woods Associates, discovered seven dormouse nests in nest tubes up to 1km south of the wood – were they moving out of their woodland home?

This year, another revelation: 20 nest boxes that had been put up two years ago in a fragment of wood, isolated by the motorway and separated from Little Linford Wood by 500m of managed hedge and scrub, showed evidence of dormice. Very excitingly, in the October check, Tony Wood found a young female dormouse weighing about 15g. She had a distinctive white tip to her tail. Even more encouragingly when he went back to check the boxes in November, Tony found the same female – now weighing 18g, together with a male of 22g - in the same box.



PTES is now focusing on encouraging all the farmers in the area into Higher Level Stewardship and making sure that all remnant fragments of woodland in the area are connected by well managed hedgerows. It is also a chance to engage with the Highways Agency to try and develop suitable dormouse habitat alongside Britain's oldest motorway.

LEFT & BELOW: John Prince and Paul Manchester who monitor Little Linford have been helping out the population at Windmill Naps, Warwickshire - this year's release site. An abondoned litter was found in one of the release cages. John Prince kindly picked them up and the animals - which he hand-fed (left) - are now thriving (below.)

Training courses and news

■ DORMOUSE FORUM

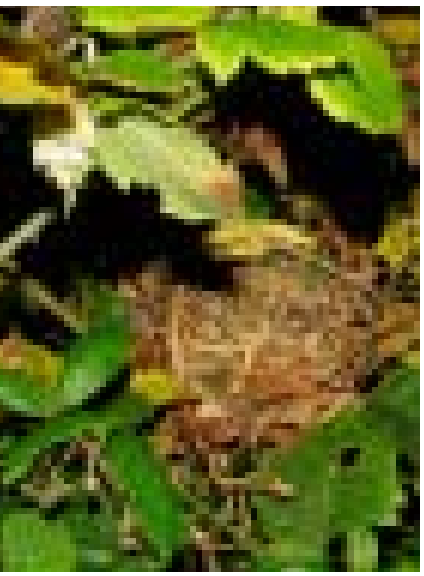
Are dormice eating hazel nuts or not?

In 1995 I surveyed woods in the south of England for dormice-chewed hazel nuts. These included woods around Winchester where a hurdle maker was coppicing on an eight year rotation. Although instinctively I felt that dormice should be present I found no hazel nuts, chewed or otherwise.

Mick Peacey

Despite hazel being the most frequently found shrub in the hedges on our farm here in Devon, I have never found a hazel nut opened by a dormouse - and we know we have a good population of dormice. Unless very rare, I would have expected to find them when laying hedges with mature hazel bushes. Grey squirrels take most of our hazel nuts when they are still very green and long before the dormice would be taking them. Intriguingly in mid-October I found a dormouse nest, with a dormouse in it, with a hazel nut growing just a few inches away (below). It was curious that the dormouse had not eaten it.

Rob Wolton



Last year we surveyed 0.25ha of hazel coppice with an oak and ash overstorey in West Sussex. We did a fingertip search on 40 x one square metre plots scattered randomly throughout the area and found 528 hazel nuts. Of those that had been eaten, 86 had been opened by squirrels, six by mice or voles, 23 had been bored into by insects and only 13 had been opened by dormice. We then put up 10 nest boxes in the same area and the following summer four of the boxes had dormouse nests in them, two of which contained litters of young animals. I would call this level of occupancy a high population of dormice but this was not reflected by the percentage of nuts opened by them (just 2% of the total).

Martin Noble

To join the forum email Susan at susan@ptes.org

■ NDMP DUSTERS

Thanks for the delightful commemorative bungs which I received with *The Dormouse Monitor*. It is very rare for something so welcome to turn up unexpectedly in the post. Woe betide anyone in my family that uses them for dusters! My daughter loves the cookie cutter and has already asked if she can make some biscuits with it.

Gill

■ GREAT NUT HUNT REMINDER

Please don't forget to take part in the third *Great Nut Hunt* this winter. We've had lots of nuts sent in already but we'd like lots more sites to be checked so if possible we can increase the number being monitored in the NDMP. For a survey pack please go to www.greatnuthunt.co.uk or call 020 7498 4533

■ HABITAT SURVEY FORMS

Please don't forget to send in your habitat survey forms with your data – or email them straight to ian@ptes.org. Call if you'd like more or have any queries.

■ MONITORS NEEDED IN KENT

The first green bridge to be created in the UK for wildlife was the Lamberhurst Bypass in Kent over the A21. Pat Morris reported on it in a previous edition of the monitor. He has recently returned and found signs of many mammals using the bridge. There are also dormouse nest boxes up but unfortunately they have never been monitored. If you would be interested in monitoring these boxes please contact Pat Morris on p.morris5@btinternet.com or 01344 621001 or Ross Wingfield at National Trust, Scotney Castle on ross.wingfield@nationaltrust.org.uk for details and permission.

PAT MORRIS

■ TRAINING COURSES 2010

The PTES dormouse day *How to Manage Woods for Dormice* taught by Dr Pat Morris will be running in the autumn. For further details contact Susan on 020 7498 4533 or email susan@ptes.org

Dormouse Ecology and Conservation is being run by The Mammal Society in Cheddar, Somerset by Alison Tutt on 14th May & 25th June, in Wildwood Discovery Park, Kent by Hazel Ryan on 23rd July, 21st August & 25th September and in Cheddar, Somerset by Alison Tutt on 1st October.

Each course includes a visit to check nest boxes where it should be possible to handle dormice. For further details and to book a place call 02380 237874 or email enquiries@mammal.org.uk.