winter 2009

the dormouse monitor

the newsletter of the national dormouse monitoring programme

people's trust for **endangered species**

INSIDE

Welcome

With the dormouse fieldwork season over it's time to send in your 2008 dormouse records. Thank you to everyone involved in the NDMP, all your help is very much appreciated. Even if you did not find any dormice this year we would still like to know as negative results are just as important as positive ones. Last summer was another wet and disappointing one and will certainly have affected dormouse numbers. Many of you have reported that dormouse numbers are very low indeed and little breeding had occurred. There was some good news from Cumbria (see back page) where their highest ever dormouse numbers were recorded. With our continually poor summers, it is important to remember that habitat management becomes more critical than ever.

We were hoping that the new online data entry system would be ready for last years' records but sadly it is not ready yet; it will be working for the 2009 data.

2009 is the 21st birthday of the NDMP. We hope you will celebrate with us. Ideas to get you going will be in the next issue.

Best wishes

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People's Trust for Endangered Species

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

Cover image kindly provided by Hugh Clarke. Printed by NPL Printers on environmentally friendly paper.

Dormouse release, Yorkshire

The hazel dormouse is now back in the Yorkshire Dales National Park (YDNP) following last years' successful reintroduction. It is 100 years since they were last recorded in the Park. Once again it was a joint effort by Natural England, PTES, Paignton Zoo, ZSL and the Common Dormouse Captive Breeders Group, who, along with the YDNP, released 35 dormice into Freeholders' Wood near Aysgarth in June. Staff from PTES and Paignton Zoo placed the dormice in mesh cages attached to hazel trees within the wood. The dormice were fed by staff and volunteers from the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority. After ten days, openings were made in the mesh to allow the dormice to explore.

In September a group of local volunteers, led by Dr Tim Thom, of the YDNP, carried out the first box check. 58 dormice were found in 19 nestboxes plus a further 32 boxes had empty nests in them. This was an encouraging 26% occupancy of the total 195 boxes placed throughout the woodland. The largest litter that was found was of eight young. 21 of the 58 animals found were under 7g. 15 of the animals caught were from the original group released, six females and nine males. The remaining 43 consisted of nine females, 11 males and the rest were not old enough to be sexed.

It is always interesting to look at the distance the released animals have travelled from the cages they were originally released into. The distances varied from 10m to 280m. Three of the furthest were across the railway that runs through the middle of the wood. The record however belongs to a female who was originally released near the Falls path who travelled 280m to a box in the north-western corner of the newly coppiced plots north of the railway line. If the animal travelled in a straight line this would have involved crossing open ground along the railway line at its widest point through one or two year coppice to arrive at the box. It's encouraging that the dormice are travelling throughout the wood and we wait to hear the results of the spring check in May to hear how the animals fare over winter.

FACTS

16 reintroductions in 12 counties in 16 years.

A total of 635 dormice have been released.

In 2007 618 dormice were recorded at the release sites; an average of 13 per visit.

At all release sites dormice survived their first hibernation and reared young.

At 3 sites dormice have moved beyond the release site. Unfortunately 3 sites no longer have dormice.

The 2008 dormouse release at Asygarth Falls in the Yorkshire Dales National Park has been a great success to date.






New hedgerow mapping project

Hedgerows are highly valued as wildlife habitat, providing an important food source and acting as vital corridors for the successful dispersal of woodland scrub species such as dormice. Agricultural intensification and loss of traditional management practices have been key drivers in the massive loss and deterioration of hedgerows in Britain. Detailed knowledge of hedgerow presence and quality is lacking in relation to the key species that depend upon them.

Historically dormice were frequently found in hedgerows. Their abundance is, however, dependent on sympathetic hedgerow management. The current fragmented state of Britain's hedgerows has left dormice in England in isolated populations and there has been a 64% decline of dormouse occurrence in hedgerows since the late 1970s.

PTES is launching a three-year project to map the presence and quality of hedgerows around known dormouse areas. The project will provide the basis of management plans and involve practical work to restore hedgerows so as to connect isolated dormouse populations and offer new habitat. The work will benefit many other BAP species too such as hedgehogs, harvest mice, polecats, bird and insect species that depend on hedgerows.

In addition to creating a digital map of England's hedgerows around known dormouse areas, the project will involve volunteer recruitment and training, hedgerow surveying, delivery of hedgerow management advice and information, facilitating and contributing funding for hedgerow replanting and developing a scheme to reward wildlife-friendly hedgerow management.

TAKE PART

To volunteer for our hedgerow project and help to map the hedgerow connections across the countryside please contact Jim Jones at jim@ptes.org or call him on 020 7498 4533.

ROB WOLTON

Hazel pollarding update

In the last issue we had an article about pollarding hazel and asked if any of you had tried it, whether you found it beneficial or not. Thank you to everyone who contacted us, here is what you said.

Paul Manchester who monitors Little Linford wood in Bedfordshire, the site of a 1998 dormouse release, explained that a large area of their wood had been clear felled in 1986. This was re-planted in 1988 and a 30 year coppice cycle started from 2002, with the hazel being pollarded at about waist height to reduce browsing. Paul's team also use the felled branches to make dead hedges around the coppiced area. Oak are left to grow, whilst silver birch and ash are cut at ground level. This method has been very successful in reducing the browsing on the re-growth of the hazel, which has grown back so effectively that the field layer of flowering plants seems to have been detrimentally affected. Previously when areas of ash and hazel were coppiced at ground level they grew back almost entirely ash.

Mark Rawlins from Cumbria uses traditional coppicing methods with fencing as opposed to pollarding. Whilst acknowledging that the initial cost of fencing can be expensive he says that the more times a fence can be used the cheaper each one becomes in the long term. His oldest fence has been up for 16 years and is protecting its fourth coupe.

Mark ascerts that in his experience pollarded hazel suffers a higher mortality and does not throw out as many or as vigorous shoots as hazel that has been cut 'hard' to the ground. "Pollarding should only be regarded as a short term solution to what is a long term problem with deer."

ROBIN HAMILTON

NDMP woodlands

The NDMP has proved to be a wonderful tool to plot trends in the national dormouse population over time. It also provides an opportunity for people to actively participate in wildlife monitoring. Since 2004 PTES have asked for additional records of other mammals that are using the boxes and this year we would like to refine this by asking monitors to also record the weights of any pygmy shrews and yellow-necked mice using the boxes. Advice on how best to achieve this without getting bitten will follow in spring.

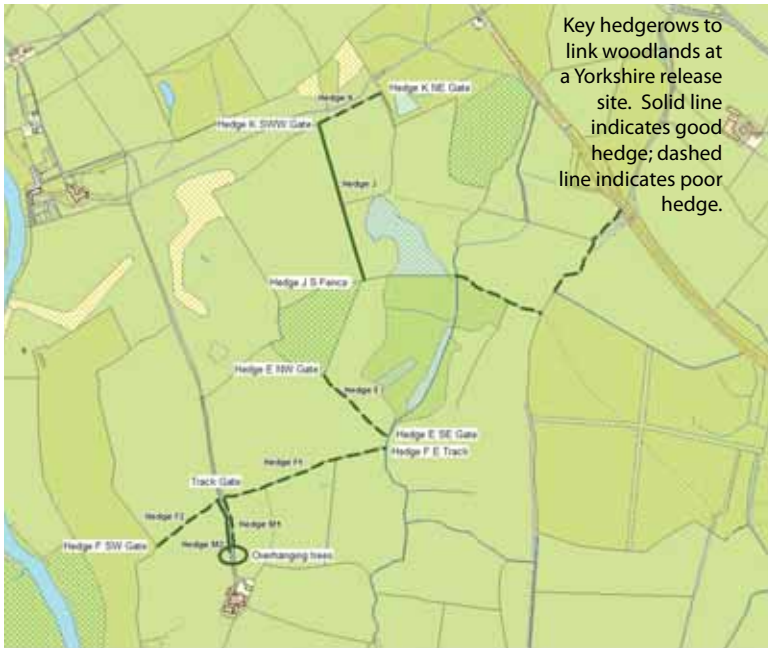
In addition throughout 2009 we would like to ask recorders for a habitat assessment of the areas around their boxes. Details are yet to be finalised but it will probably be a simple, single month's survey of how closely the woodland structure around each box matches one of the six diagrams shown below. This is a very broad habitat survey but over time it will hopefully reinforce our ideas of the type of woodland structure that is preferred by dormice. It may also help us to achieve another of the initial aims of the NDMP which was to use it to provide a focus for local habitat management.

More information will be in the next *Dormouse Monitor* and it will also be sent out with the recording forms in the spring.

Ian White
Dormouse Officer

SARAH HOBBS

Habitat-linkage work



Key hedgerows to link woodlands at a Yorkshire release site. Solid line indicates good hedge; dashed line indicates poor hedge.

Ian White has been successfully working around the reintroduction sites, with the landowners both of the woods and the surrounding areas, to link up dormouse-friendly habitat to encourage these populations to spread into the wider countryside. In the summer of 2004, 61 animals were released in two adjacent woodlands in Yorkshire. They were chosen as they are large coppice woodlands that are actively managed. It was considered that these woods would be an ideal habitat from which the dormouse population could expand and then begin to disperse. Although it is highly unlikely that the dormice have already fully utilised the suitable habitat within either of the woods; there was an excellent opportunity to link additional woodlands in the area with hedgerows. This would greatly increase the amount of potential habitat available to dormice in the future and would also benefit many other hedgerow species.

The local FWAG Conservation Advisor helped us liaise with local landowners and a walk over survey was completed on the site to identify existing key hedgerows and sites where new planting would be beneficial. A provisional plan was then sent to the landowners and tenant farmers for discussion and to identify which hedgerows would benefit most from more sensitive management. Once this had been agreed a more comprehensive survey was undertaken on those hedges selected, looking at 10m sections and identifying what species were present, their density, gaps that required planting and future management. Such a survey allows for a more structured and precise long term management programme on the key hedgerows, which is more likely to be acceptable to the farmer, or landowner, and hence are more likely to be undertaken in the short and long-term.

Seventh international dormouse conferen

Delegates were shown the first wire bridge in use in the UK during their field trip through Cheddar Gorge.

A PIT-tagged dormouse was on hand for participants to see.

Various local experts, including Andrew Parker, gave talks about the different projects going on across the site.

The nine mile walk on Sunday's field trip took in Black Rock where the first monitoring of the NDMP scheme was undertaken.

MICHAEL WOODS, DAVID WELLS

The Somerset village of Shipham, nestled in the Mendips close to Cheddar, was the venue for The 7th International Dormouse Conference last September. The conference, hosted by The Mammal Society and organised by its chairman, Michael Woods, was an opportunity for 145 scientists, conservationists, consultants, monitors and dormice enthusiasts from eighteen countries, from Japan to South Africa, to present papers on new research, project updates and observations on dormice species from around the world.

Presentations were given on population studies, predation and parasites, monitoring, and genetics covering the hazel or common dormouse *(Muscardinus avellanarius),* together with the edible *(Glis glis*), forest (*Dryomys* spp) and garden dormice (*Eliomys* spp) found in continental Europe; the woodland dormouse (*Graphiurus murinus*), one of 15 species native to Africa; and the Japanese dormouse *(Glirulus japonicus)*.

Among the highlights were two wonderful presentations by Shusaku Minato on the Japanese dormouse with slow-motion footage of its locomotion and evidence for the use of artificial bridges in wild populations in Japan. Darlina Md Naim (UK) et al from the Northwest Dormouse Partnership provided a fascinating insight into the breeding behaviour of dormice through genetic analysis, revealing a polygynous mating structure. The team are also currently mapping the relationships between UK dormice populations which should reveal interesting results in due course. Presentations by Rimvydas Juškaitis (Lithuania) and Paul Chanin (UK) also provided evidence that dormice will, in certain circumstances, cross gaps as wide as 6-7m.

Workshops were held on Saturday and Monday. The first, chaired by Sven Buechner (Germany) discussed the need to monitor dormice in order to fulfil obligations of EU member states under the habitats directive, and highlighted the disparity in monitoring extent and methods (nests vs boxes) between EU countries. It was agreed some research needed to be undertaken to standardise the different approaches and much email-swapping ensued.

On Monday there was a lively discussion on good practice guidelines for woodland management for *Muscardinus avellanarius* chaired by Tony Mitchell-Jones of Natural England. Tony was seeking help on how to advise woodland managers now that legislation excludes even the accidental death of dormice through lawful practices such as forestry. Suggestions from the conference were that timing was key - work should be expressly avoided during the earliest part of the breeding season - and that felling in individual woods should be considered in a larger spatial context similar to the impact assessments undertaken for great crested newts.

PTES was well represented in the talks. Jim Jones et al presented a history of the NDMP, now in its 21st

ce, Cheddar Somerset

year, together with a new examination of data from this dataset, the longest running national terrestrial monitoring scheme in the world. A paper on reintroductions in the UK co-authored by Ian White, PTES Dormouse Officer was presented showing the success of the project to date after the 16th reintroduction last June.

On Sunday there was a nine mile field trip in the Cheddar area to see various dormouse studies, including PIT tagging, being carried out by The Mammal Society's local group and the site at Black Rock where systematic dormice monitoring in the UK first began in 1988, during which the weather was thankfully very kind. Many of the conference participants also took the opportunity on Tuesday to visit the edible dormice project at Tring with Pat Morris and Brian Barton.

The next International Conference will be held in Saxony in 2011, hosted by Sven Buechner.

READ

Rimvydas Juskaitis is selling his book *The common dormouse muscardinus avellanarius ecology, population structure and dynamics*. It costs £12 (15 including p&p). Please contact Rimvydas by email at juskaitis@ekoi.lt

WATCH

Roger Trout from the Forestry Commission featured in a BBC film about his work with dormice in conifer plantations. Go to: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/7693465.stm

PROJECT: Chipped dormice
COUNTRY: England
BRIEF: Michael Woods presented a paper jointly with Roger Trout from Forest Research based on data collected from two sites.

Over 150 hazel dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) have been PIT tagged by Roger in a Corsican pine plantation in Worcestershire since 2002 and some 45 dormice have been tagged since 2006 in a 5ha hazel coppice area in Somerset by volunteers from The Mammal Society's local group. Some animals have been recaptured from nest boxes after over two years of apparent absence. By adding to the monthly count of animals found during box checks not only those dormice known to be chipped and subsequently rediscovered as alive but also those found for the first time but which must have been alive during some of the previous checks, it has been possible to back calculate the number of animals known to be alive at any one check. From this it was found that the average number of dormice known to be alive was about three times the number actually found in boxes. There will, of course, be further dormice that have never used a dormouse box and so have never been caught.

PROJECT: Edible dormice ecology
COUNTRY: England
BRIEF: Pat Morris reported on a ten-year population study of the edible dormouse (*Glis glis*) that he and a number of other volunteers have been carrying out in woodland near Berkhamstead. Almost a thousand individual dormice have been marked

using implanted PIT tags and details of breeding success and longevity recorded. One of the key findings was that the population failed to breed in some years but in those with a heavy crop of beech mast, a 'masting year', reproduction was high with between 200 and 300 young being found in the 130 nest boxes. The interesting point about this, as Pat indicated, was that the animals appeared to be able to predict masting years and time their reproduction accordingly so that there was plenty of food for the larger population to prepare for hibernation in the autumn. Generally speaking masting years occur every other year but 1999 and 2000 were both masting years with the dormice breeding accordingly. On the other hand 2006 and 2007 were both years when the edible dormice produced large numbers of young but only 2006 was a masting year.

PROJECT: Locomotion of the Japanese dormouse.
COUNTRY: Japan
BRIEF: Shusaku Minato gave an enthusiastic presentation looking at locomotion in the Japanese dormouse (*Glirulus japonicus*). It was revealed at a previous International Dormouse Conference that, while the hazel dormouse moves around predominantly on top of branches and twigs, the Japanese dormouse spends most of its time hanging underneath its arboreal pathways. Shusaku has shown experimentally,

using long thin wires strung over a gap, that this mode of locomotion appears to be more efficient and stable for the dormouse when compared with the Japanese woodmouse which tried to balance on top of the wire when crossing the gap. In his latest paper, Shusaku worked with the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation using high speed cameras taking up to 2000 frames a second in order to study in much greater detail the locomotion of these dormice by slowing down the film. The animals moved alternate diagonally opposite limbs when travelling upside-down (from a European perspective!) through bushes and shrubs. If they were moving particularly quickly, they also make use of their tails as a counterbalance swinging it alternately left and right in order to keep their bodies stable.

Dormouse bridge report Wildwood, Kent

There is an increasing problem of habitat fragmentation caused by roads, woodland access tracks and other infrastructural projects. Last year Ian Stride, working at Wildwood Trust, Herne Bay, Kent, undertook an experiment to discover which types of wire mesh tunnels dormice may show a preference for, and therefore could be used in mitigation. With PTES funding Ian spent several months constructing an experimental enclosure with different sized wire mesh tunnels spanning an access track in woodland and monitoring the extent to which they were used by the captive-bred dormice at Wildwood.

Four tunnels, two 'large' ones at 200mm in diameter and two 'small' ones at 150mm in diameter, were set up. One of each size was filled with sisal, which resembles rope, and was used as a substitute for vegetation whilst the others were left empty.

Small groups or individual dormice were placed in the experimental enclosure for a period of time, after which they were replaced with another small group, or an individual. Initially two adult females were in the enclosure for a week, followed by three younger males, which were in the enclosure for about three weeks. These were then replaced with two adult females, which remained in the enclosure for approximately a week. Next, a single male was tested for four days, and finally the activities of the two original females were re-monitored for a week.

Two cameras were set up to monitor their activity over a period of seven weeks with the cameras being moved to different positions every week or so. In total, the cameras recorded 117 images of dormice using the tunnels. Eighty-nine of these recorded images showed use of the vertical tunnels, compared with only 28 that showed use of the horizontal ones. However, all of the 'groups' of dormice, both males and females, did at some point in time travel across the entire length of the tunnels and were found the following morning in their nest boxes inside the opposite enclosure on the other side of the track. In all cases the dormice used the empty tunnels significantly more frequently than they did the tunnels with sisal inside. Nonetheless, it is certainly worth experimenting with different types of vegetation to see whether it gives significantly different results from sisal.

Interestingly of the 117 recorded images of dormice using the tunnels, 100 were of males and only 17 of females. Working out a method that takes into account how many days were spent in the enclosures by each sex, females were only found in 14% of the images taken, compared with 86% for males. Overall, this suggests that males appear to be more willing to use tunnel bridges than females.

Ian also recorded the weather patterns to see if they had any effect on when or if the dormice used the tunnels. It appears that empty tunnels were more likely to be used under conditions of high cloud cover than low cloud cover. Ian also found that the large empty horizontal tunnels are used when the temperature is relatively high, but the small empty vertical is used considerably more frequently when temperatures are lower (below 15°c). Finally, it was found that dormice tended to use the small empty vertical tunnel more often at higher wind speeds, and the large filled vertical tunnel more often at lower wind speeds.

Overall, this project has shown that dormice will use wire mesh tunnel bridges. They could, therefore, play a valuable role in linking fragmented habitats of isolated and endangered dormouse populations in the UK and beyond. However, more research needs to be carried out to test their optimal design using different substrates and under various weather condition, with wild populations.

Various tunnels were constructed at Wildwood to see which size and length were preferred by the dormice.

IAN STRIDE

PTES intern: Alison Looser, Suffolk

In 2008 Alison Looser was awarded a PTES mammals internship to undertake a project with Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT) to create a 'living landscape' for the county's hazel dormice. The project focused on the Stour Valley, where previous survey work undertaken by SWT between 1999 and 2007 had revealed that there are three main clusters of wild dormice. These are centred in the parishes of Bentley, Assington and Polstead. However it was not known how fragmented the populations are because the habitat quality between the woodlands had not yet been surveyed.

The main aims of Alison's project were to assess the habitat corridors between the fragments of woodland in each area; identify where priority links need to be made by planting a new hedge or gapping up an existing one; and survey woodlands and hedges in each cluster using nest tubes in order to gain a better understanding of dormouse distribution.

Alison surveyed all the links between woods within each cluster and categorised them as either species rich, gappy, species poor (intact) or no hedge, based on features such as height, width, species composition and management.

Key to the success of the project has been Alison's excellent rapport with the 30 landowners contacted during the project, who have been very helpful at all stages.

Bentley was shown to have the largest area of woodland of the three parishes with about 10% ancient woodland and 1.5% secondary woodland in 20 woodland blocks. Eight woodlands were known to support dormice and nest tube surveys showed that in addition they were present in disused railway line hedgerows, as well as three new woodlands. This could be exciting evidence of juvenile dispersal. These fragments are linked by a good network of ancient hedgerows, one of which was shown to support dormice through nest tube surveys.

Assington has about 8% woodland cover across 11 blocks, five of which were already known to support dormice. Several good hedges link some of the woodlands, with new hedges recently planted. Long-term monitoring of dormouse populations at Tiger Hill and Spouses Vale suggests populations are just hanging on and are in serious threat of becoming extinct without further conservation efforts.

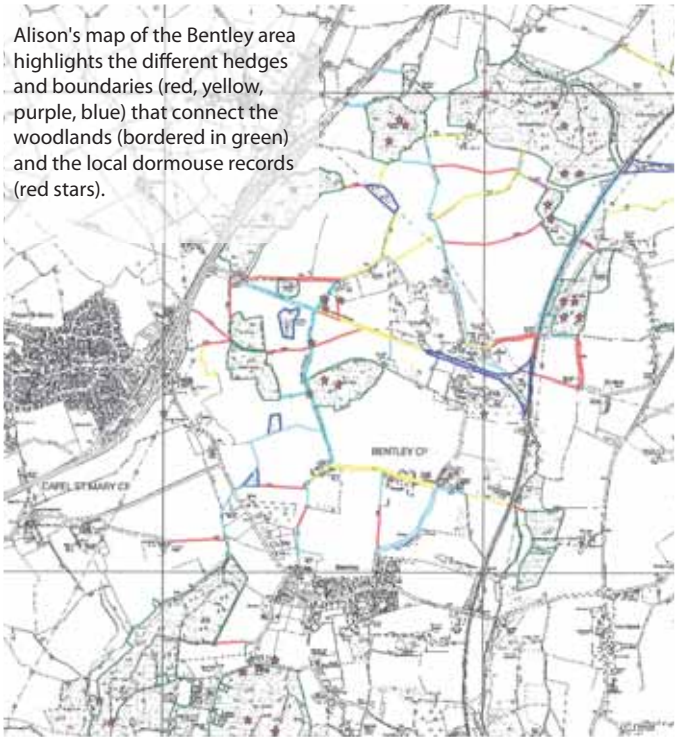
Polstead has approximately 4% ancient woodland over 12 blocks and a good network of large, ancient hedges with previous studies showing that many contain permanent dormice populations. A previously un-surveyed woodland was also found to have dormice. Linkages in the north of the parish are better than those in the south.

Bentley is therefore the most viable cluster for dormice in Suffolk but currently contains no NDMP sites. Assington requires the most work to link up fragmented woodlands, however with land-owners cooperation this is already starting this winter. Negotiations are also under way to reinstate critical sections of hedges in Polstead, where a land-owner has also agreed his site can be entered into the NDMP scheme.

Alison's report also recommended habitat improvements in six sections of priority habitat improvement plus a further six for secondary improvements in each of the three parishes. The report will be used to encourage landowners to plant new hedgerows or gap up existing ones, creating a better landscape for dormice in Suffolk.

JANET LOOSER

Alison's map of the Bentley area highlights the different hedges and boundaries (red, yellow, purple, blue) that connect the woodlands (bordered in green) and the local dormouse records (red stars).



Monitoring Midger Wood

Monitoring the dormice in Midger Wood, a Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust Reserve in the south of the county, has been going on for 15 years. It is a 22 acre wood in a steep-sided valley, and is part of a much larger area of semi-natural ancient woodland all of which is a SSSI. In 1994 50 boxes were erected in March and by the end of May one box was occupied by a dormouse and 10 were occupied by small birds. This 20% occupancy by small birds – mostly tits and wrens – has continued ever since.

From 1995 onward boxes were inspected monthly from May to October but by 1997 we had 105 boxes and inspections from April to November were carried out. At this time we had five regular monitors, two with licences, all newly retired and with energy and enthusiasm.

By 1997 the records suggested that we had two very small populations of dormice in our wood. Subsequently we have sometimes wondered whether one of those populations has survived but it seems to be hanging in there as we have found one or two dormice over the last two years. We have to remind ourselves that, hopefully, there are other dormice who shun our boxes!

In 1998 we positively identified yellow-necked mice, as they are bigger, smellier, and more inclined to bite than wood mice. Their population grew over the next two years and by 2000 we were concerned at the explosion of yellow-necked mice as they were taking over some of the boxes and we lost one family of dormice to predation by them. So when their population crashed between August and September 2001 we had to admit we were not sorry!

We understand that this population crash occurred in other areas too. We have seen few yellow-necked mice since.

By 2004 the original team of monitors was beginning to worry about the future – we were all 10 years older and some had had to give up. By coincidence this was the year in which two members of the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust wanted to get experience to obtain their dormouse licences and asked GWT if they could join us. Not only was it a good year for monitoring, it was a good year for the dormice. In July we recorded the largest number we had ever recorded in one month and we found five families. Unfortunately for the first time we also found dead dormice and one infested with "a small number of reddish insects".

In common with most sites 2005 was a poor year, which was disappointing after 2004, and we were questioning whether there was any explanation – was the winter too mild for deep hibernation, was the summer so dry that they did not need our boxes, and this reminded us again that there may be many dormice out there who do not consider our boxes to be desirable residences.

2006 was a better year for the dormice so the small 2005 population must have been strong enough to survive the winter as we had 16 adult dormice during 2006 and six families.

2007 may have been a disappointing year for dormice but it was a good year for wood mice and an eventful year in other ways. The BBC radio programme *Shared Earth* visited us during the June survey on a gorgeous summer's day when the wood looked at its best and the presenter was delighted to see his first dormouse. In November, one of our founder monitors was 80 on the day we were monitoring so we had a birthday cake made by one of the other volunteers.

Since monitoring Midger Wood, our population has not declined and is relatively stable. It has also revealed which boxes have never been used and which are most favoured – now we ought to see if we can find out why. 2008 has not been a good year for dormice but we have a splendid team of monitors, several of whom have attended conferences outside the county during the autumn so we are confident that our monitoring will go on and we have lots more to discover about the dormice and about the whole habitat of our ancient woodland site.

Dora Clarke

The Midger Wood monitoring team have been recruiting new members.

LAUREN ALEXANDER

Devon dormouse work & BAP update

As the smoke cleared a distinct squeaking could be heard coming from the ground. Burning is a traditional management practice for Devon's culm grassland mire pastures, to stimulate fresh growth for livestock; these treeless places are not where one would expect to find dormice. And yet here were six nests among the smouldering Molinia tussocks, with the dormice still in them. Heathland gorse bushes, Douglas fir plantations, rampant rhododendron, cropped roadside hedges, and a reedbed are some other infrequent habitats. Dormice are not everywhere, but could be anywhere. A stoical response is to attribute these occurrences to 'NFD': Normal For Devon. However if this broadens the definition of potential dormouse habitat, it also has practical implications for monitoring, planning control, and Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) work.

In August 2008 some 40 dormouse workers gathered at Paignton Zoo to meet, network, and talk dormouse as part of the BAP work. Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) is county 'champion' agency for the dormouse, with responsibility for co-ordinating and supporting local work. This was the second Devon dormouse BAP get together and legal aspects were topical, with regards to the recent loophole-plugging changes to UK legislation imposing stricter guidelines for licensing, as were the national BAP targets of maintaining and increasing the UK dormouse range and population size. Unfortunately we don't have a thorough monitoring/surveying effort and knowledge of baseline data, so not all regions of the country, including the key east Devon area, are adequately represented by monitoring sites. Devon Biodiversity Records Centre described the current state of dormice, dormouse records, and how the two compared. Distribution is relatively well known, but little is revealed about population changes or densities. To complicate matters an additional layer of data, from planning casework, consultants' reports, and incidental records, only sporadically makes it to the Records Centre. Out of this some four-five new dormouse sites might pop up each year.

Dartmoor National Park, the North Devon Dormouse Project, Stover Country Park, Exeter City Council, and DWT described their varied experiences with nest box schemes, which together account for 11 of the 16 currently running in the county, some still going strong after 10 years or more. 2008, from different parts of Devon, has varied between being either a decent or quite bad year for breeding dormice. At Stover, dormice have been found nesting among the rhododendron scrub, and breeding in nest tubes. The long distance Tarka Trail has made a feature of dormouse sites and projects along the route, which are planned to be extended, while Devon Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) promotes dormouse conservation work through hedgerow schemes and the annual Devon Hedge Week events.

Attendees then learned about research at Paignton Zoo and Exeter University. Studies at Exeter University are investigating hibernation, diet, and testing tracking tubes as a monitoring technique. Paignton's research department has supervised student projects on use of nest boxes in reedbeds, pre-hibernation feeding, and nest material preferences. A study this year looked at foraging behaviour of captive animals, measuring exertion carried out to obtain a food reward. Paignton is also involved in two national programmes: veterinary research, conducted into the health of wild dormouse populations, and as part of the dormouse captive breeders network. Fatty liver syndrome is a particular area of interest and possible concern. Finally the group visited the dormouse captive breeding facilities based at the zoo.

The annual BAP day will be repeated. For more information about DWT's dormouse BAP activities please contact Jackie Gage jgage@devonwildlifetrust.org, tel. 01392 279244

Devon dormouse yahoo group:

http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/devondormousers

Stephen Carroll,
Devon Wildlife Trust

CATE JACKSON, ANDREW TAYLOR

Sixteen woodlands are being monitored throughout Devon; nest tubes are being used to find new populations.

Training courses and news

TRAINING COURSES

The Mammal Society is running at least seven *Dormouse Ecology and Conservation* day courses next year. The dates, at present, are 8 and 26 June, 18 July, 15 August, 18 and 19 September and 16 October. The venues are in Somerset, Kent and Devon. Half of each course is indoors and the other half in the field where it should be possible for participants to handle dormice.

The Mammal Society will also be running at least two *Dormice and Development* day courses for ecological consultants on 2 and 27 March in Somerset. For further details and to book a place telephone 0238 0237874.

Janice Whittington is running three *Dormouse Ecology & Conservation Courses* in 2009 on 2 June, 2 September and 28 September all at Hallsannery Centre, Devon. The programme includes ecology and conservation. For more details or a booking form contact Janice at: Watertown Farm, Landcross, Bideford, Devon, EX39 5JA. Tel 01237 459679 janwhittington@yahoo.co.uk

DORMOUSE FORUM DISCUSSIONS

We've had a record breaking year in many respects here in Cumbria. Double figures four months running from May-August; never had anything like this before and not so early in the year. These four months have now broken the previous record for an entire year. Whilst I'm not complaining

I'm extremely puzzled as to why numbers have rocketed. We don't appear to have had as much rain as down south. It was so dry that in June badger cubs were seen in the middle of the day well away from setts, presumably because they were desperate for earth worms. How have others fared in 2008, anyone else experienced this 'explosion' in numbers?

Wonderful news for Cumbria - unlike you, we in Sussex are experiencing our worst numbers for years! In fact so far we have not found any dormice and very few other mice at all!! It was encouraging to hear your news. I wonder what the explanation is.

Likewise it's great to hear some good news - here in mid Beds we're having our worst year since the dormice were reintroduced in 2001. We found one in May and one in August.

It is dreadful down here in Somerset too. The simple answer is the weather. Three bad summers in a row can eliminate some dormouse populations and this is the second!!

Things started well at our site in Cornwall with about 40% more in May than last year, but there have been fewer in subsequent months and only three attempts at breeding compared with seven last year.

Our dormouse numbers are beginning to increase this month, but there is still no sign of any woodmice or yellow necks, not even a nest. After two 'boom' years for them I assume this is a 'crash' year, at least in this area. Is the crash UK wide or does anyone have lots of 'unwelcome' guests in their boxes?

Today we found eight yellow necks and only one dormouse (the first since May), but I was reading recently that yellow necks should have their own conservation status, I personally like to see them. Admittedly, their numbers do boom and bust, and I am not sure if there is conflict over the boxes, but over the past 20 years we have had both in our wood. Perhaps a bad year for dormice such as this one would mean a greater impact of any competition in future years.

If you would like to join the forum please email Susan at susan@ptes.org

NUT APPEAL

Next year will be the 21st anniversary of the NDMP. To celebrate PTES will be running a series of events and activities, including our 'Mammal Detectives' workshop at schools and fairs. It involves the children examining a set of clues to solve the mystery of the stolen hazelnuts! Consequently we need your help to collect a large quantity of hazelnuts that have been nibbled by dormice. Please send as many as you can to Emily at PTES. Also if you could help by hosting any dormouse events to highlight the celebrations please call Emily on 020 7498 4533. Thank you!

DORMICE ON FILM

Last year there has been a lot of press about the various dormouse projects occurring around the country. The Yorkshire dormouse release was featured both locally and nationally on *Countryfile*. Roger Trout's work with the Foresrty Commission was filmed by the BBC and our own woodland Briddlesford was featured on ITV Local Meridian. To see the footage please visit our website http://ptes.org/index.php?page=285

GARDEN DORMOUSE

Here is a picture of a dormouse we found in our garden in Margaretting, Essex. I heard my nan shriek so I knew there must have been a creature of some kind as she isn't keen on live animals. There it was sitting on a tree looking sweet and innocent, showing us its beautiful features. It stayed

in the tree for 30 minutes and then disappeared. We think it is using a bird box in a neighbouring tree. I would love to find out how to attract other rare animals into my garden.

Jordanne, aged 11.