SPRING 2005

The Dormouse Monitor

Newsletter of the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme

ENGLISH NATURE
Royal Holloway University of London
PEOPLE'S TRUST FOR ENDANGERED SPECIES
ZSL LIVING CONSERVATION
TRACKING Mammals PARTNERSHIP

Welcome To The Dormouse Monitor

It is a pleasure to welcome you to *The Dormouse Monitor* for the first time-since I joined PTES in February as Chief Executive. It is an enormous challenge and I'm already enjoying learning about our varied work from our committed supporters and staff, and making plans for the future.

And of course I am looking forward to the dormouse season too! We have another dormouse reintroduction arranged. This year we will be releasing up to 30 animals at Chatsworth House, in Derbyshire.

You will have received your recording forms for this year's work with this edition of The Dormouse Monitor, or via e-mail. If you haven't then please get in touch with us and we'll send them to you. We are very grateful for all your continued hard work. Good luck with your checks this year. Remember, we have now set up an online system where you can enter your data via the internet. Please let us know if you have any queries.

Lastly, I must pay tribute to Valerie Keeble who retired as Chief Executive of PTES at Easter. We send Valerie our best wishes for a long and happy retirement.

Yours sincerely

Jill Nelson
Chief Executive

PTES, 15 Cloisters House, 8 Battersea Park Road, London SW8 4BG.
www.ptes.org Tel: 020 7498 4533 enquiries@ptes.org

The National Dormouse Monitoring Programme is funded by English Nature and PTES. The scientific work is based at Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, Surrey TW20 0EX and the organisation is carried out by PTES.

The Dormouse Monitor is compiled by Nida Al Fulaij & Susan Sharafi
Pictures kindly provided by Dr Pat Morris, Dave Bevan, and PTES.

Printed by NPL Printers on environmentally-friendly paper.
Registered Charity Number 274206

The day a dormouse came to lunch

As everyone who regularly checks nest boxes knows, the boxes are not just occupied by the species you are trying to monitor. Whilst out checking bird boxes for pied flycatchers, I came across a couple of dormice. When the lid was slightly ajar, two youngsters about three weeks old, squeezed out and escaped! One 'parachuted' to the ground, bounced on the leaf litter and ran for cover. The second dormouse ran up the outside of my jacket and onto my shoulder. From there it climbed up the back of my head onto my cap!

I closed the lid immediately to avoid any more escaping. Raising my hand, I tried to catch the youngster still sitting on my cap, admiring the view. Not surprisingly it departed quickly, back down the way it had come. With my arm raised, the neck of the jacket bulged slightly, creating an interesting hole: the dormouse ran straight in. I was left perched at the top of the ladder feeling the dormouse crawling right down the middle of my back, until it reached my waist.
Carefully, I descended the ladder and began to strip down to vest, pants and shirt, shaking each garment as it was removed. Still no sign of the little dormouse! I presumed it had dropped out silently onto the leaf litter. Quickly I dressed myself inspecting and shaking each item as I put them on. The wood is a public amenity and I could have been had up for indecent exposure! -

Returning to the car, I loaded the ladder and returned home for lunch. Whilst washing my hands I heard a soft plop. You've guessed it! There was the dormouse, running across the floor to hide behind the heated towel rail. He was quickly caught and returned safely to the woods. I cannot believe, even to this day, how the dormouse had not been crushed at some point during his adventure!

Gordon Vaughan
Devon

Encouraging dormice to spread throughout the countryside

As we reported in the last Dormouse Monitor, PTES and English Nature asked Jennie Caddick to identify and prioritise the actions required to improve linkages between woods around dormouse reintroduction sites to assist the spread of introduced dormouse populations. Jennie spent three months working on the project at the end of last year.

Jennie assessed 12 sites (Leashaw Wood is still to be reviewed) and identified short-term and long-term assessments for each of the required work to be done to improve the linkages and prioritised them accordingly.

Four categories were used:

High*: where the reintroduction site needs management to maintain optimum habitat for dormice to sustain the current population. An example would be hazel coppicing on long rotation.

High: where the surrounding habitat would benefit from immediate work on site such as hedgerow connectivity between suitable woodlands or coppicing in adjacent woodlands.

Medium: where the reintroduction site and surrounding habitats would benefit from some input in the form of grants or other funding, management advice, or volunteer recruitment in the short-term.

Low: where good working practice for dormice is already underway by a secondary group (in and outside the woodland) or the reintroduction site is large enough, and the dormouse population small enough that immediate work would reap no benefit at this stage.

All 13 dormice reintroduction sites are located throughout the central and northern areas of the UK.

Little Linford Wood, in Buckinghamshire, was rated as the highest priority in terms of work needed. The site has a very high dormouse population and would benefit from increased woodland management in terms of coppicing as the dormice have not spread throughout the whole woodland.

Stockton Dingle, in Cheshire, was also rated highly and has a good success story of dormice spreading throughout the site since their release in 1996 and 1997. The coppicing needs to be continued to ensure that fruiting hazel is available to support the increasing population of dormice.

Bubbenhall Wood in Warwickshire (pictured left), is a lower priority site. The local landowners are already doing good work encouraging the improvement of hedgerows that link it to the other woodlands nearby. The site itself is also relatively large and the dormice have not spread throughout the entire woodland.

PTES is hoping to continue Jennie's good work and employ someone to assist the owners and volunteers at each site to get the funding in place to carry out the work needed to help our dormouse populations to spread further into the countryside.

Discovering dormice in strange places

The principal habitat for dormice is the shrub layer of mixed deciduous woodland. They are at home around the margins and in cleared areas (such as coppice) where new growth provides vigorous, bushy habitat. They also occur in species-rich hedgerows, naturally, as these are effectively linear strips of shrub habitat. In fact they often do well in such places (and in small copses) because the shrubs are not overshadowed by big trees, as they would be deep in a mature forest.

Unfortunately, the idea has got about that dormice do not occur anywhere else, but they do of course. It is nothing new to find them in scrub that has developed on previously open hillside (although such habitats may become unsuitable after 15-20 years, due to dense shady growth). Dormice are also found from time to time in areas dominated by conifers, especially where these have been planted among existing deciduous shrubs and trees. It's not clear what they eat here, but it is likely that they make extensive use of aphids and other insects that live among the conifer needles. They might even benefit from nibbling at exuding resin from wounds in the trees.

Dormice even turn up in reedbeds occasionally and in gardens too, where a clump of pampas grass has been reported as a hibernation site. A few lucky people have gardens that are near enough to good dormouse habitat that the animals turn up on bird tables and peanut baskets. At Chilworth (near Southampton) Alastair and Betty McKay for example even have them coming to their window sill.

However, interesting these records are, we must beware of focussing too much on the exceptional and forgetting the norm. Yes, dormice do occur in 'non-typical' places, but this does not mean that conservation and management strategies should be distorted to cater for the unusual. At the same time, it is also important to recognise that dormice are not totally habitat-specific and might turn up almost anywhere with trees and/or shrubs. Consequently, when developments are planned

This dormouse came close to the house to feed from a bird bath.

(such as road widening), no woody habitats should be assumed to lack dormice simply because they are not 'typical' or because they lack hazel or some other presumed essential feature. The more we look the more we find, which is very encouraging. If dormice can manage to live in a wide range of habitats it makes their survival in a fragmented landscape less uncertain. But that doesn't mean to say that they are secure and at home in areas dominated by heathland, gardens, reeds or conifers, even though their presence in such places is nevertheless of considerable interest.

Pat Morris

Coppiced hazel stands, in natural ancient woodland, provide ideal habitiat for domrice.

Monitoring the edible dormouse

The edible dormouse was introduced to the UK in 1902. One hundred years on, it is thought that there are now about 10,000 Glis glis within a restricted range across Herefordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire. Although their numbers do appear to have increased, their spread has been limited by open countryside to the north-west and urbanisation to the south.

As a non-native species the edible dormouse holds a peculiar legal status. It is protected throughout Europe under the Bern Convention and the Wildlife & Countryside Act, meaning that it is illegal to trap them without a licence. If caught, it is then illegal, under a different section of the Act, to release edible dormice into the wild, as they are not native to the UK. This can cause dilemmas over what to do with trapped animals that are causing damage and disturbance to people's homes.

Pat Morris has been monitoring one edible dormouse site over the past few years. The results have shown a wide annual fluctuation in numbers, which have been so extreme that any trends have been masked. The number of adults found in the nest boxes has ranged from less than 40 to over 100. It is thought that the number of individuals is linked to the availability of beech mast, with lower number of animals occurring in years when masting does not occur. At these times the animals leave the site and take up residence in people's homes, taking advantage of alternative food sources.

Extracted from theTracking Mammals Partnership Report

Health surveillance in reintroduced dormice

We are continuing to carry out health checks on the captive-bred hazel dormice taking part in the reintroduction programme.- This is carried out to prevent the accidental introduction

of potentially serious, infectious disease into release populations which could have deleterious effects on their abundance and dynamics.-

Close monitoring of the dormice's health and behaviour is also important to minimise the welfare risks of reintroductions.-

The health surveillance programme has been-in operation-since 1999 and we have monitored the health and welfare of over 300 hazel dormice, screening these animals for parasites which might affect their fitness and population viability.- We continue to treat dormice for one suspected alien parasite, a cestode or tapeworm, found in captive populations, that has not, as yet, been found in wild animals.

We also have some animals every year which have clinical conditions that could reduce their chances of-survival in the wild. Some have infections or shorter than average tails. Although they may do fine, if released, we only send the healthiest animals for release to ensure the highest success.
-
These animals are held back in the captive populations, to add to the following year's breeding stock.- Thank you to the many people who contribute to the health surveillance programme, which is carried out by the vets and nurses at the Zoological Society of London, Whipsnade Wild Animal park and Paignton Zoo.

Tony Sainsbury,
Zoological Society of London

A look at other surveys & monitoring programmes

The Mammals Society's Water Shrew Survey
The Mammal Society's Water Shrew Survey is now entering its final survey season (July - September 2005). The survey is proving very popular with volunteers and we are building up a good picture of the distribution and habitat preference of the water shrew. In the first two survey seasons alone our volunteers surveyed over 1000 sites and found evidence of water shrews at 16% of these sites. The habitat information collected will help us to recommend the best habitat management strategies needed to conserve this species.

The survey is using the bait-tube method to locate water shrews. Short lengths of plastic tubing are baited with casters and placed in bankside vegetation at freshwater sites chosen by volunteers. The tubes are left in place for 2 weeks. Small mammals, including water shrews, enter the tubes to feed on the bait and linger long enough to deposit droppings. As water shrews are the only species to feed on aquatic invertebrates, the remains of these prey items in droppings determines the presence of water shrews at a site.

All droppings found in the tubes are returned to The Mammal Society for analysis and volunteers receive a copy of their results. There is still time to take part so please contact us for more information.

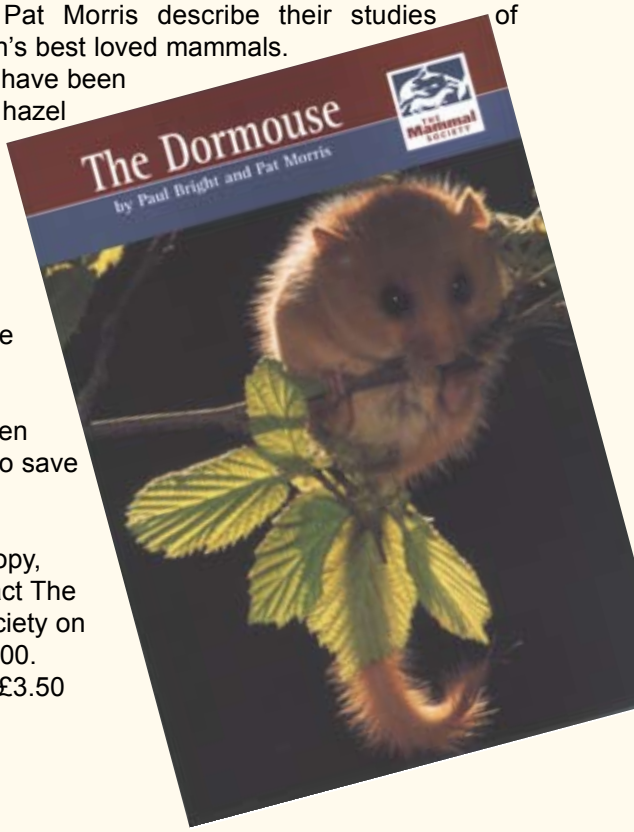
The National Owl Pellet Survey
Owls are highly efficient birds of prey, and small mammals provide a large part of their diet, particularly the barn owl (Tyto alba). This survey has been running since 1993 and aims to provide information on the current distribution of small mammal species in the UK and to identify seasonal and annual variations in the prey species caught and consumed by various owls.

To find out more about any of these surveys or to take part please contact Dr Phoebe Carter on 020 7350 2200 or pcarter@mammal.org.uk

Pick up a Polecat!
This survey, run by The Mammal Society and The Vincent Wildlife Trust, is designed to produce a new 10 km square distribution map for the polecat in Britain using road kill specimens. To date, records of pure polecats have come from one hundred and forty six 10 km squares and polecat/ferret hybrids have been recorded in 35 squares. If you see a dead polecat please contact us for further information.

NEW Mammal Society Publication
The Dormouse, Paul Bright and Pat Morris

The latest in The Mammal Society's popular series of booklets on British mammals, dormouse experts Paul Bright and Pat Morris describe their studies of one of Britain's best loved mammals. The authors have been studying the hazel dormouse for over 20 years and explain their biology and ecology as well as the conservation programmes that have been undertaken to save them.



To order a copy, please contact The Mammal Society on 020 7350 2200. Copies cost £3.50

National Bat Monitoring Programme

This year the Bat Conservation Trust is launching two new surveys: the Woodland Survey will involve surveying for all woodland bat species, focussing on the rare barbastelle bat; and the Roadside Survey, which will involve driving around a 15km square and recording bats on a bat detector clamped to the car window. It will be interesting to see what they reveal about species populations and distribution over the next few years. Meanwhile the established surveys continue to produce interesting results.

Lesser horseshoe bats roost in huge numbers.

Colony Counts
Volunteers are being asked to take part in Colony Counts in June, which involves counting bats as they emerge from their roosts at dusk. Last year the peak counts for each species surveyed for were as follows (locations in brackets): common pipistrelle – 672 (Shropshire), soprano pipistrelle – 1450 (Pembrokeshire), serotine – 287 (Somerset), brown long-eared – 200 (Derbyshire), Natterer's – 131 (Buckinghamshire), lesser horseshoe – 466 (Gloucestershire).

Bat detector surveys
2004 saw a large increase in the number of volunteers taking part in bat detector surveys. The Field Survey (July) involves walking a triangular transect in a 1km square and counting the number of pipistrelle, noctule and serotine passes. In 2004, 183 sites were surveyed, 145 of which had common pipistrelles, 83 had soprano pipistrelles, 94 had noctules and 42 had serotines. The Waterway Survey (August) involves walking along a 1km stretch of river and counting Daubenton's bat passes. In 2004, 261 sites were surveyed, 210 of which had this species present.

Sunrise Survey
If you don't know of any roosts or don't have any bat detector experience then you can still help by taking part in the Sunrise Survey (July/August) which simply involves venturing out at dawn and looking for bats swarming before they return to roost. This is an excellent way of seeing bats and finding new roosts. In 2004, 89% of volunteers saw at least one bat, 36% saw bats swarming and 28% succeeded in finding roosts. In total 57 roosts were found.

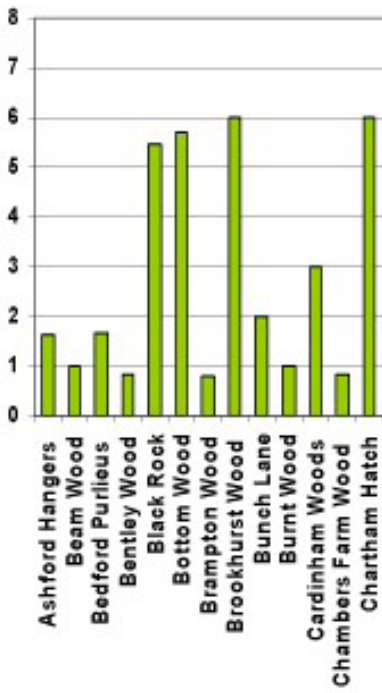
Population trends
So far the monitoring programme has identified significant increases in the populations of common pipistrelle, Daubenton's and Natterer's bat, and a significant increase in the size of lesser horseshoe colonies. Other species have shown increases or decreases and longer-term monitoring is needed to reveal whether these trends are significant or not. Also more sites need to be surveyed each year in order to improve the confidence limits of the species population trends. In addition this will help BCT to produce population trend data for each country of the UK and English government office region. Therefore more volunteers are urgently needed to take part in surveys.

Loose bark can provide ideal roosts for bats. Look at these potential sites for swarming bats

For more information on the how to take part in the National Bat Monitoring Programme contact the Bat Conservation Trust on 020 7501 3622, email nbmp@bats.org.uk or go to http://www.bats.org.uk/nbmp/index.asp.

2004 National dormouse records

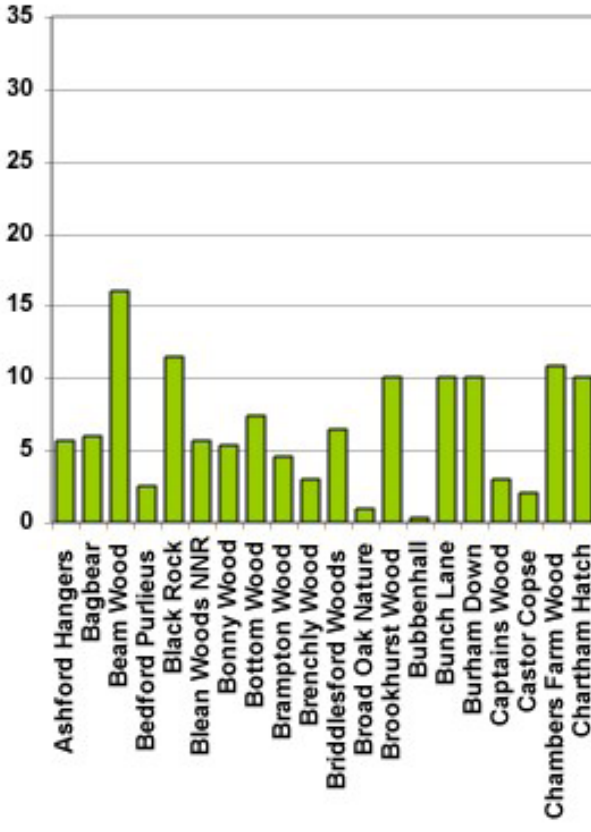
Last year appears to have been a good year for dormice, with many monitoring sites recording their highest ever numbers. Many of us expected that during the exceptionally warm summer of 2003 many more dormice would be found than usual but this did not happen. We then hoped that because of that good summer, young from that year would do well and we would see good numbers in 2004. This prediction seems to have come true. Overall numbers are well up on the previous year. Altogether, there were ? visits made to 167 sites and a total of 4296 dormice recorded.



Sites with extremely high numbers of dormice per number of boxes included Larkey Valley (yet again!), Hook Wood, Kings Wood (all in Kent) and Andrews Wood in Devon (see table). High numbers were also recorded at Little Linford Wood, the 1998 reintroduction site. The heaviest dormouse recorded in October weighed in at a hefty 41.9g and was found at Hurrell Wood in Devon. Several sites recorded dormice using boxes well into November, this was probably due to the mild weather conditions and abundance of food still available to the dormice.

Table to show the number of dormice found at three sites in October 2004

Site	No. of boxes checked	No. of dormice recorded
Larkey Valley	**50**	**65**
Hook Wood	**54**	**51**
Kings Wood	**50**	**40**
Andrews Wood	**50**	**54**



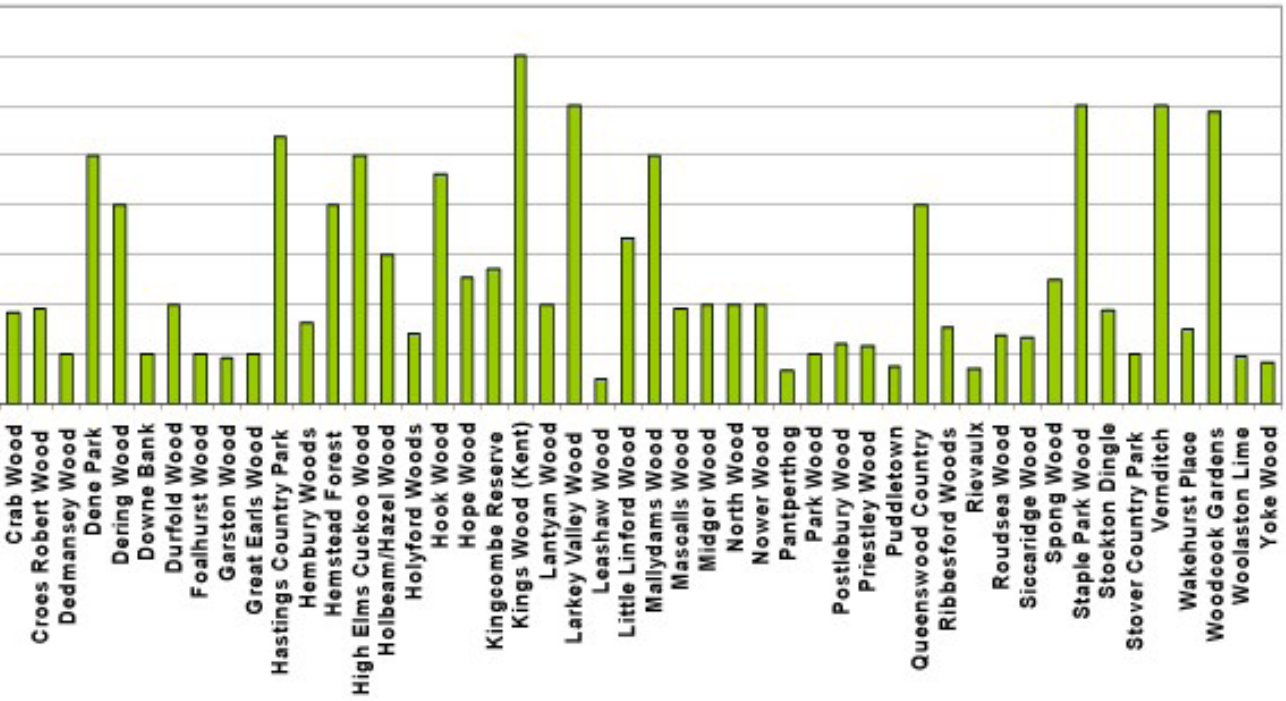
As well as many sites having a good year, unfortunately several reported that they had had a very poor year indeed. Of the 167 sites monitored, 20 did not record any dormice or evidence of them using the nestboxes.

97 sites returned records for other mammals encountered while on dormouse box checks. 10 other species were found and a total of 1798 animals recorded. The most abundant species was the wood mouse. Others included yellow-necked mice, shrews, bank voles and bats. The most numerous bat species were brown long-eared bats and other species found included pipistrelle, Natterer's bat and one lesser horseshoe bat in Cheddar, Somerset. The most number of bats found in one box were 15 brown long-eareds huddled together in a nestbox at Roudsea Wood in Cumbria.

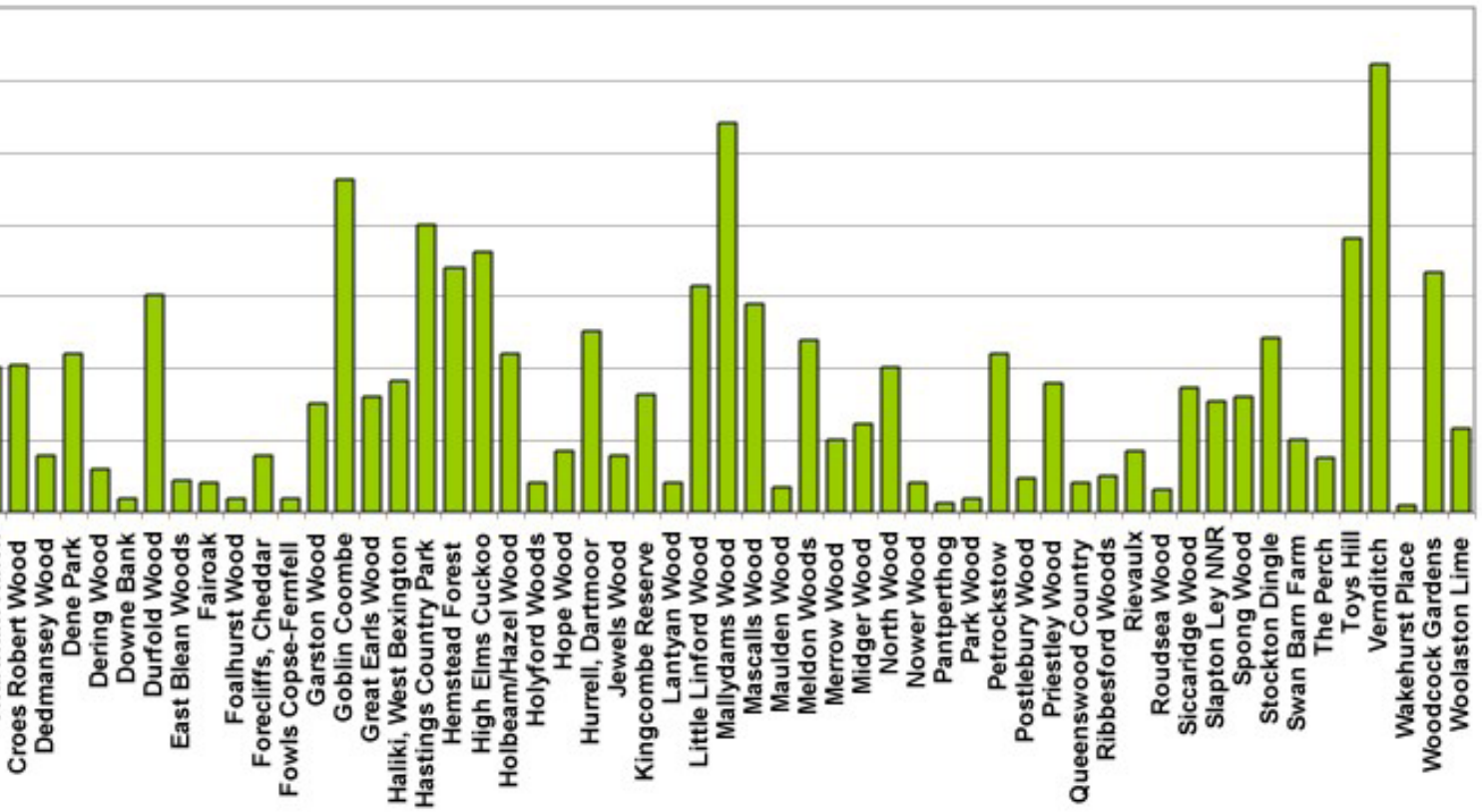
Good luck with this years monitoring, hopefully those who did not do so well last year will have better numbers this year. And those who had good number will continue to do so. We look forward to seeing your results in the autumn. Thank you

Susan Sharafi, PTES

Number of dormice (7g or over) per 50 boxes, June 2004



Number of dormice (7g or over) per 50 boxes, October 2004



NB Sites with exceptionally high numbers of dormice have been omitted from the graphs in order not to distort them

Volunteer news and questions

Do you have enough volunteers?

We are worried that some sites that have been registered within the NDMP are not being checked because there are not enough volunteers to carry out this work. Please let us know if you have problems recruiting new volunteers to help you check your site, and we will do our best to help.

Replacing old nest boxes

Please also ensure that your site has sufficient boxes in good condition. A site generally needs around 50 nest boxes for the data that you collect to be comparable, and to provide us with useful, ongoing information. New boxes can be purchased for around £6 each (including p&p) from Kingslake Resources (tel: 01544 340657) or from Jamie Wood Ltd (tel: 01323 727291)

Please help train new licence holders

We are often asked where people can go to get experience with box checks and handling dormice before applying for their licences. If you are able to accomodate people on your box checking days and have time to show them how to carry out the checks safely, please can you let us know. We can then pass your details onto people in your area who would like to get trained up to help with monitoring dormice.

Dormouse training days

This year PTES will be running the popular 'How to manage woods for dormice' training day twice. As usual the tutor will be leading dormouse expert Dr Pat Morris. On Saturday 1st October the course will be held at Wildwood in Kent and on Wednesday 12th October at Bramley Frith in Hampshire. For futher details and a booking form please contact Susan at PTES on 020 7498 4533 or susan@ptes.org.

The Mammal Society will be running a number of dormouse courses throughout the year. For more details call 020 7350 2200 or see their web page www.mammal.org.uk

Dave Williams, from Surrey Wildlife Trust, will be running a training day on 25th June. For more details e-mail Dave on djwilliams@surwild.cix.uk

Dormice in nestboxes in the winter

"*Whilst cleaning the dormouse boxes out at High Elms on 28th January ready for the coming season I found a torpid dormouse in an old structured dormouse nest. It was a male weighing 23 gms and seemed quite healthy but had a 3 mm diameter skin lesion below its right shoulder looking like an umbilicus - not inflamed; it also had some faecal debris around the anus. All the other 69 boxes were devoid of dormice and contained only yellow-necked and wood mice. I did not know what to make of this and thinking the dormouse may be on its way out (and anticipating a post mortem) I checked the box again on 8th February at 12:35 am and found the same torpid dormouse weighing 23.4 gms and, apart from the sore on the shoulder, it looked very healthy.*"
Bob Francis, Kent

Dr Paul Bright, RHUL, replies:
"*Dormice do turn up now and again in nestboxes during the winter. Some such individuals are likely to be ill and the one described may well have been injured while it was torpid.*"

'International Conference on Dormice'

The 6th International conference on dormice will be held in Poland this year. The conference will take place from 20th - 24th September. For more details please go to: www.ib.ap.siedlce.pl/dormice.html

If you have any questions or news that you would like to share please e-mail us on enquiries@ptes.org