AUTUMN 2007

the dormouse monitor

the newsletter of the national dormouse monitoring programme

INSIDE

Welcome

Welcome to the winter 2007 issue of the *Dormouse Monitor*. We hope you enjoy this issue and find it an interesting read. You comments are most welcome and if you ever have any articles or news you would like to share with other monitors please let us know.

Many thanks to all of you who have already sent in your data for this year. If you haven't done so yet, we look forward to receiving it in due course. Even if you didn't find any dormice we would still like to know about your visits. It was a very promising start to the year with many early litters being recorded. Unfortunately, the extremely wet summer we experienced seems to have reduced dormouse numbers at many sites. But the autumn was much drier with good crops of fruits and berries, giving the dormice a good chance to put on lots of weight prior to hibernation. Once we have entered all this year's data onto the database we will report back to you on how dormice fared in 2007.

Best wishes

Nida Al Fulaij & Susan Sharafi
PTES

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

Cover image kindly provided by Emmanuel Do Linh San.
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Dormouse hibernation strategies

Dormice spend up to half of the year hibernating, right through from October to May. As highly-specialised feeders they have adapted this strategy to lengthen their lives, living off their fat stores over winter, built-up during late summer and autumn after feeding on a glut of berries and nuts.

I am often asked where dormice hibernate by children and visitors and in most cases I pass on the information that is provided by Dr Pat Morris in his book '*Dormice*'. Hibernating dormice are most commonly found on the ground under layers of leaves, under log piles and thick mats of moss. However they are also found in tree stumps, under brushwood, in leaves at the base of hazel coppice, among roots and tangled wood at the base of old hedges.

I also keep captive-bred dormice for the release programme and the dormice I have in captivity have only ever built their nests' in leaves and woodchips on the top of the six inch layer of soil in the bottom of the cages. I did put logs in the cages one year but they did not use these. Perhaps it was not damp enough underneath them.

Having said that, we have never found a hibernating dormouse in the wild. We know there are plenty in the wood but have never found them. Is it possible to use a heat seeking device to find nests? Could sensitive sound detectors be used to locate dormice when hibernating? Does it matter that we do not know exactly where they are? If their preferences for hibernation sites in a particular wood can be identified then provision for these conditions could be duplicated and sites made safer against predation.

How many dormice are lost each winter to the badger, fox, stoat and weasel? Also trampling by deer and human activity? We have teams of volunteers coppicing during the winter, which is essential to maintain the habitat for dormice and many other species. Some of our dormouse helpers work on this project but have never come across hibernating dormice. Why is this?

Sites vary a great deal, so dormice could use different tactics in hibernation too. For instance, in the Cheddar Gorge we were taken to a steep hillside covered in rocks where dormice thrive in the hazel bushes. Here they may be using crevices in the rocks where they would be safe from most large predators. Some woods are on hillsides where the ground stays relatively dry, with very little ground cover. Others like Little Linford are wet woods, with areas ankle deep in water in bad winters.

So what are the conditions like in your wood? And more importantly, do you find hibernating dormice?

This winter we intend to do a careful ground search before an area is coppiced. Then in the spring after the dormice have become active, dismantle log piles to look for winter nests.

If you have any records to pass onto John please email Susan on susan@ptes.org

J. A. Prince, Little Linford

KATE MERRY, IAN WHITE, JOHN PRINCE

PTES-funded dormouse bridge study

As habitat fragmentation is one of the main causes of the decline in wild dormouse populations and this species is known to actively avoid crossing open spaces, dormouse bridges could be a solution. Little research has been carried out in Britain to find out if they could really work but it is becoming increasingly important to link habitats as more of our countryside is fragmented by roads and development schemes. We are waiting for results from the Somerset experiment with anticipation.

My project is designed to test out basic variables such as the shape, length, angle and construction material of bridges to find out what dormice prefer. I will use captive dormice so that results can be achieved in a much faster timescale and video cameras to observe their behaviour in detail. The objective of this study is to produce and test a dormouse bridge that enables dormice to cross highways and access tracks on farmland.

Captive-bred dormice at Wildwood will be used to test bridge design and suitability, as these will be easier to monitor than wild populations. Wire-mesh tunnels will be constructed between dormouse enclosures to determine if dormice will travel the required distance needed to cross highways and access tracks on farmland. Two enclosures made of wire mesh and timber shall be constructed either side of an access track within the natural woodland habitat of Wildwood. These will be linked together by 6-8m long horizontal tunnel constructed of 250mm^2 wire mesh suspended beneath a supporting wire.

Similarly constructed vertical entry and exit tunnels will be attached to both ends of the horizontal tunnel.


Ian Stride in constructing different tunnels to see which ones dormice will use.
WILDWOOD

Various materials will be placed in the tunnels to provide the dormice with cover to see if this increases their use of the tunnels. I will use a mixture of living ivy, honeysuckle or old man's beard. Tunnels without substrate will also be tested.

A digital recorder shall be permanently set up and used to monitor the nocturnal activities of the dormice to determine if they use the tunnels, and the video footage shall be viewed and noted the following day, and reset for the following evening. Additionally, food will be placed at one end of the tunnel to test for dormouse presence and use, and again checked and replenished the following day. Alternatively, in order to determine the successful useof the tunnel, soot boards or inkpads may be used to collect footprints, or sticky tape to collect hair samples from the dormice as they traverse the tunnel.

Ian Stride, Wildwood

Edible dormice in a stew?

Fifteen restaurateurs in Italy face criminal charges after food inspectors discovered dormouse stew and braised dormice in wine and red pepper sauce on their menus.

The edible or fat dormouse was a delicacy in Ancient Rome, when it was fattened on walnuts, and is still much appreciated in parts of Italy. However, it is now a protected species and when food inspectors raided a festival in Calabria they found several rodent casseroles.

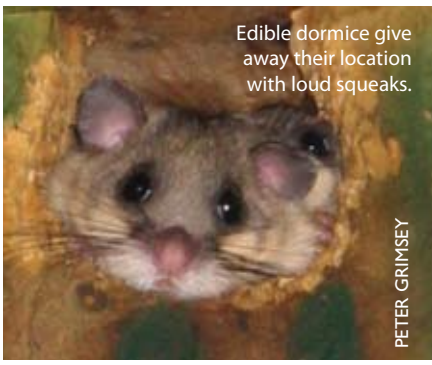
The restaurateurs say that there were actually rats in the stew but investigators from the Forestry Corps, with DNA experts from the Carabinieri scientific investigation team, took samples from the delicacies on offer at the festival and analysed the meat in their laboratories.

Alessandro Bettosi, the Forestry Corps officer who led the raid, declined to give details of the case for fear of compromising continuing investigations.

Andrea Brutti, of the Italian Society for the Protection of Animals, said that illegal hunting of dormice was rife in Calabria and that 20,000 were consumed a year in the Catanzaro area alone. "Demand is now so high that the edible dormouse is becoming an endangered species," he said. He added that the illegal trade was linked to the 'Ndrangheta, the Calabrian Mafia, and that the woodland habitat of dormice was at risk from forest fires and development.

Connoisseurs of the edible dormouse say that it has a strong smell and is for strong stomachs only.

Brutti said that the hunt was at its height in early autumn, when the dormice take on extra fat to get them through their period of hibernation. Some people catch dormice at other times of the year and fatten them up at home, a habit that dates to Roman times, when the legions took dormice with them on military expeditions as a food reserve.


Edible dormice give away their location with loud squeaks.
PETER GRIMSEY

Edible dormice are hunted at night. They are either shot, skewered or trapped, using chestnuts and walnuts as bait. Their loud squeaking enables hunters to locate them and turn searchlights on them.

Richard Owen © The Times, London, October 14th 2007

Coppicing and hazel management

Coppicing is an old form of sustainable woodland management which makes use of the ability that most deciduous trees have to regenerate themselves when they are cut. The process of cutting also significantly extends the life of the tree. Using this method the tree is cut level to the ground in the winter months and then left to regrow. When it reaches a harvestable size it is recut. This is a 'cycle' or 'rotation'. The idea is that areas, known as 'cants' or 'coups' are cut sequentially. The number of these areas usually relates to the time in years for the trees to reach a harvestable size so there is always annual produce.

Coppiced trees therefore provide a significant part of the understorey in a woodland and are a regular and sustainable source of timber when managed properly. The most common trees to be coppiced are hazel, hornbeam and willow.

Coppice is a major type of woodland in Britain, which on the whole has been left without management since the Second World War. The result is that much of our coppice woodland is desperately in need of re-cutting in order to preserve its integrity and maintain its overall health.

Hazel coppice stools, when not cut, become old and 'overstood' and cast a high level of shade on the woodland floor restricting the growth of understorey shrubs like bramble. There will be a few very heavy branches and a high number of new adventitious branches. After 50-60 years the weight of the mature branches will eventually pull the root out of the ground and kill the stool. A wood will begin to lose its coppice stools and may revert to high canopy woodland.

What options are there to manage overstood hazel for dormice?

The problems of hazel management for conservation concern rather than commercial production are twofold. One is the difficulty presented for hazel regeneration by the browsing of rabbits and deer and the second is the problem of resources to achieve the necessary management.

There are two possible solutions to the problems of hazel regeneration:

1. cut the older branches at a height of approx 1m to balance the weight distribution on the stool (effectively pollard the branch). This will encourage regrowth above browsing height. This technique has been successfully applied at a number of locations including Bramley Frith. However there may be a future problem where, unless management is ongoing, the weight of the new growth on the old branch may eventually cause it to split and damage the stool.

2. cut the older branches at ground level to balance the weight distribution on the stool (effectively coppice the branch). Sacrifice the regrowth to browsing and allow the secondary shoots to develop into new poles.

If either of the above operations are undertaken on a selective level both on individual stools and within the coupe over a number of years it will impart a low level management regime that will have a big impact both in maintaining the integrity of the coppice and allowing the shrub to fruit.

Ian White. PTES

PTES

Of dormice and men...

Did you know that Africa has 15 dormice species? Since 2002, Rod Baxter and his Small Mammal Research Team, at the University of Fort Hare, have been studying these animals to increase our knowledge about them.

It's mid-morning in the Valley Bushveld Thicket, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. A man picks up and opens a trap which was lying on the branch of a bushwillow. "There is one !" exclaims Rod Baxter, thereby breaking the soothing silence which was enveloping the riverine forest. Barely one minute later, a handsome, silver-grey-furred small rodent was standing in a "Ziploc" plastic bag, unsuccessfully trying to climb the slippery walls of this rather unusual "habitat". One could clearly distinguish its buffy-white underside, the prominent ears and the dark eye mask, but most importantly, its long and bushy tail.

Rod Baxter's interest in small mammals originated in 1974. He was working as a research assistant for the late Professor Waldo Meester, at the University of Natal. The young student successfully bred a colony of captive shrews, which was received with great excitement by Meester, one of the leading South African mammologists of his generation. As a result, the colony breeding project continued… and so did Rox Baxter's passion for small mammals.

Very little is known about African dormice, and even their current classification and the number of species are matters for discussion. Whereas seven genera of dormice occur in Eurasia, only two are recognized in Africa: *Eliomys*, which is only represented by the North African, eastern orchard dormouse (*E. melanurus*), and *Graphiurus*, with 14 species. Of the latter genus, only 4 species occur in Southern Africa. Two of them, *G. ocularis* and *G. platyops*, inhabit rocky hillsides and koppies, while the two others, *G. murinus* and *G. parvus*, are essentially arboreal. It's on one of these species, the woodland ormouse (*G. murinus*), that Rod Baxter decided to conduct long-term research.

While preliminary data were first gathered in 2002 in the indigeneous Afromontane forest of Hogsback, parallel investigations were also conducted from 2003 on, in selected riverine forest streches of the Great Fish River Reserve, which lies between Grahamstown and Fort Beaufort. As virtually nothing was known about the life history of African dormice, the research objectives first focused on population dynamics such as the sex-ratio of dormice populations, their age structure and basic information about their reproduction cycle.

The research team began to trap, mark or identify, and release dormice every month, working alternatively in the one or the other study area. Sherman live traps, baited with a mixture of rolled oats and sunflower oil, were set on inclined trunks and branches (generally at a height of between 1 and 2 m), and sometimes on fallen branches or logs. Although traps were also set on the ground, the Fort Hare zoologists caught more than 80% of the dormice above ground level, which seems to be fairly logical when working on an arboreal rodent.

In order to ensure better monitoring of the population, especially with regard to reproduction (notably to determine the number of young per litter), and the occurrence of torpor, wooden nestboxes were also installed in both study areas. Whereas dormice from the Hogsback persistently snubbed using these artificial nests, their fellow conspecifics living in the Great Fish River Reserve rapidly moved into their new homes, even using some wooden boxes as larders ! This discrepancy in the behaviour of the two dormice populations remains enigmatic, and seems rather paradoxical. Indeed, the riverine forests of the Valley Bushveld Thicket contain large numbers of Cape Bushwillows, which are prone to rotting. As a consequence, dormice and other animals have access to a large number of natural cavities and tunnels, where they can nest, breed and store food. Nevertheless, the nestboxes provided by the zoologists apparently attracted the dormice even more. In the Afromontane forest of Hogsback, nesting possibilities appear to be more restricted, and yet, the arboreal rodents do exactly as they please. "We assume that Hogsback's dormice find sufficient hollows in yellow woods and lemonwoods and are consequently less disposed to move between resting sites", says Baxter.

After being caught in Sherman traps or found in nestboxes, the dormice are transferred into "Ziploc" bags to be weighed. Getting them out of Sherman traps just needs a sharp shake. However, a trick has to be used to get dormice out of nestboxes. A wooden stick is pushed into a nest and the dormice rapidly climb the

ALL IMAGES Emmanuel Do Linh San

...continued

stick and end up in a bag set over the stick's top end. To avoid letting animals which are inclined to acrobatics escape, the nestbox is first placed in a large dustbin bag. Who said that doing science was dependent on sophisticated and costly materials?

After weighing, the dormouse is lightly anaesthetized by placing tissue paper soaked with ether into the plastic bag. Sedation allows the researchers to sex, and mark or identify animals without pain to the mouse – or the researcher! Marking is done by tattooing ears with different numbers. Additionally, ink colour is changed annually, in order to quickly identify the year in which a retrapped rodent was marked.

A few years of field work has brought interesting results, notably on dormouse life history. In the Great Fish River Reserve, these rodents mate in November. Females give birth in December to an average of four blind, deaf and naked young. The latter are already fairly independent in January, when approximatively one-month old. In May, before becoming torpid in winter, their weight has reached 20-25g. They breed in the following summer, and reach a weight of about 35g when aged 17 months. Some of them even make it to their third summer, and weigh over 40g.

In Hogsback, dormice start to breed earlier. There is also a high probability that they give birth to two litters during the breeding season. This difference in the reproductive cycle between lowland and montane populations might well be linked to the almost three-fold variation in annual rainfall between the study areas (1200 mm in Hogsback vs 430-460 mm in the Valley Bushveld Thicket). A higher rainfall very likely ensures a good food supply over a longer period of the year, thus enabling dormice to "engage" twice in the energy-demanding process of breeding.

The South African researchers also analysed the food remains found in nestboxes, as well as other unconsumed food items stored in there. The dormice feed mainly on fruits in autumn and winter, while millipedes and beetles constitute the staple diet in spring and summer.

The study continues and new questions are constantly arising. When checking nestboxes on two consecutive days recently the researchers found that the number of young in a litter had literally doubled! It may be that female woodland dormice – probably kin (e.g. sisters) – may combine their litters. This has already been observed in another (European) dormouse species, *Muscardinus avellanarius*. Up to three adults have also been found in the same nestbox suggesting s a certain degree of sociality in dormice, Masters student Kim Madikiza is currently investigating these aspects. We look forward to reading about her findings in future.

Emmanuel Do Linh San.

The author wishes to thank Rod Baxter and Kim Madikiza.

Bontuchel Woods dormouse project...

The Bontuchel Woods Dormouse Project was undertaken as part of an PTES/MTUK internship project between 1st May and 31st October 2007. It involved surveying selected woodlands for dormice that surround the premier site for the species in North Wales – Bontuchel Wood North (also known as Coed Fron Wyllt). Connectivity studies were also undertaken to assess the quality of wildlife corridor for dormouse existing between Bontuchel Wood and the survey sites.

82 Dormouse boxes were located in a number of sites. 46 were erected within 'Bontuchel Wood' (Coed Fron Wyllt) at the edge of the wood in close proximity to the surrounding sites, and also in the southern region of the wood. (There have been no dormouse boxes placed in these parts of the site beforehand). The remaining 36 boxes were erected in 6 surrounding woodlands sites: Coed y Fron, Coed Cooper, Coed Tre Parc, Woodlands Caravan Park, the Weir Site (Bill's land) and an additional site next to the river (Michael Adams' land in the village).

Landowner permission was granted to erect dormouse nest boxes in all sites surveyed. Two landowners approached refused permission and so these sites currently remain un-surveyed. These boxes were than monitored over the four subsequent months (July – October).

The dormice used the boxes within Bontuchel Wood within the first 6 weeks, by the time we did the first survey there were nests in 7 of the boxes with one box containing two dormice, one chipped and one not. Within this first month we also found a nest in the southern region of Bontuchel Wood proving that they were spread throughout the woodland. There was also a sighting of a dormouse at another site in the southern region of the wood. However this is the only nest we have found in the southern region of the wood to date.

SUSAN - PLEASE HELP

For the first two months there were no signs of dormice in any of the surrounding woodlands. However in September a dormouse was found in Coed Tre Parc, and when we returned in October we found a further 3 animals, 1 female juvenile in with the original male, a nest containing 2 dormice (one in the nest box and one was in the tree as we approached) and a vacant nest in another of the boxes. All of these dormice were un-chipped. In September I found some dormouse chewed hazelnuts near a box in a wood in the village and also in Coed Cooper. When I returned in October there was one dormouse in each of these sites. Again these dormice were un-chipped.

The results suggest that the dormice in the surrounding woodlands are separate populations from the main Bontuchel Wood population. This is most likely to be due to a lack of connections between Bontuchel Wood and the surrounding woodlands. With habitat improvement work the connections could be improved to provide a dispersal corridor for the dormice, this may then lead to this whole area supporting a large dormouse population instead of numerous small and relatively isolated populations. This is likely to lead to an increase in genetic diversity, especially within the smaller populations, and this in turn would improve the long-term survival of these dormice.

Opposite is a diagram illustrating the locations of the boxes and the connectivity between the different sites. We also collected data on the species present within these hedges and the size of the gaps between them.

The blue lines illustrate where the connectivity is good, and the red when there are gaps in the connections. It can be seen that the best connections are between Bontuchel Wood and Coed Tre Parc, however even this connection involves crossing a road. The trees do overlap just enough to make this possible, but there is then a metal gate which the dormice would need to traverse. The rest of the connection is good as it is along the river and this is lined with interconnecting trees. The other good connection is between Bontuchel Wood

Coe

Coe

...continued

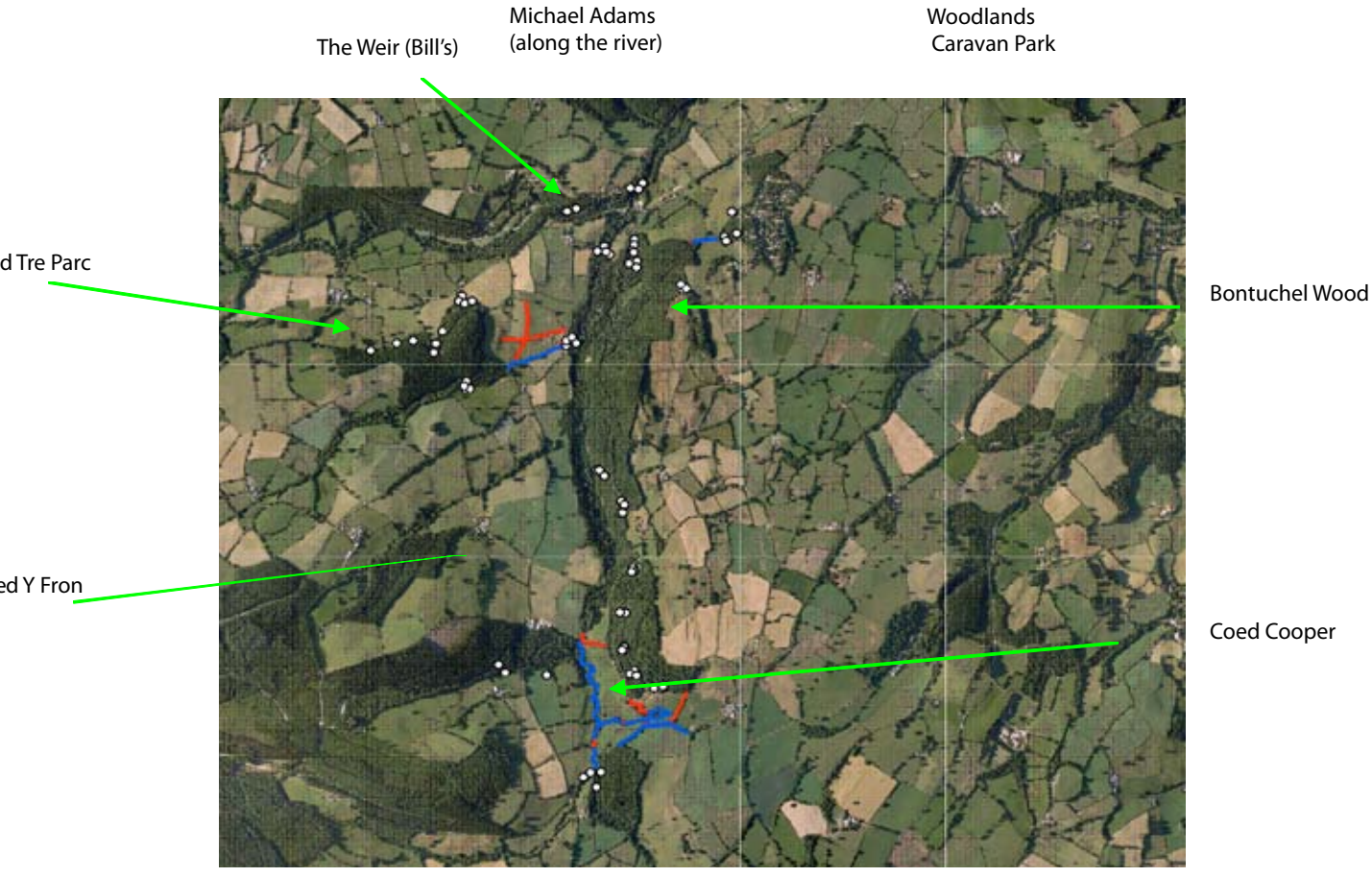
and the caravan park. This is just one hedgerow and although there is still room for habitat improvement, it is reasonably good. The village does not link up to Bontuchel Wood as the river goes through a tunnel, thus there is no vegetation link through.

South of Bontuchel Wood the key connections would very much benefit from habitat enhancement, as there are long stretches of fence line without hedgerows. Many of the fields have been enlarged and although there are some remains of old hedgerows and old standard trees, there are large gaps throughout this region. There are some areas of good connectivity, however, along the river and an old track that follows the fence lines.

This work has confirmed that there are dormice present in the surrounding areas. It is becoming clear that there is a high likelihood of dormice being present in many more woodlands than previously thought and it is necessary to undertake further survey work to help to build up an accurate picture of dormouse distribution in the area.

Adrian Lloyd Jones
North Wales Wildlife Trust

PTES/ MTUK intern Rhian Hughes undertook research on the dormouse populations and their movements within Coed Fron Goch as part of this larger Bontuchel Woods Project. She assessed the structure and health of habitat corridors between Coed Fron Wyllt and the surrounding sites using aerial photos and ground-truth surveys.



PTES

Yorkshire dormice and their future

Dormouse-friendly habitat in Yorkshire is patchy

PTES

The dormouse is a species whose range in Britain has contracted markedly over the past century. A review of records for Yorkshire noted that most came from the 19th and early 20th centuries although a few were more recent with a number of sightings from the 1950s and 1960s. The latest claims came from the Esk Valley where remains were apparently found in an owl pellet and an animal sighted in 1979, and from near Kirkbymoorside where a hibernating individual was discovered in January 1980. It is not clear to what extent these important records were verified by other mammalogists.

The current dormouse distribution as determined by the Great Nut Hunt of 1993 indicated healthy populations in the southern counties, Wales and the Welsh Marches but the species was, with a few notable exceptions, apparently absent from central, eastern and northern England. However, historically, dormice were found throughout England, even as far north as the Glasgow area. In 1997, a Victoria Nut Hunt was organised by Paul Bright which focused specifically on woods in northern England in which the species was recorded by Victorian naturalists. No evidence was found to indicate that dormouse populations still existed in Yorkshire.

The reasons for the general decline in dormouse fortunes are complex but it is thought that habitat fragmentation might be one important factor. If the population in a particular wood goes extinct for whatever reason, it can only be restored by the migration of animals from neighbouring colonies. If these are few and far between, and if there are no suitable corridors for potential migrants to use, recolonisation is unlikely, and populations are extinguished one by one. This can leave highly suitable sites without dormouse populations.

A principal aim of the dormouse BAP is to reintroduce animals to counties from which the species has been lost, and to boost numbers in counties where remnant populations are few and far between. Over the first five years of the Plan, dormouse reintroduction schemes were initiated at sites in six counties all, with the exception of Cheshire, located in the southern half of England. In 1998 a highly favourable site was identified near Helmsley, and in 1999 Yorkshire's first dormouse reintroduction programme became a reality.

Although the dormouse is now re-established near Helmsley, and more recently at West Tansfield, its future is not assured. Only continued monitoring will indicate whether the long-term trajectory of these populations is in a positive or negative direction.

Geoff Oxford
University of York

EU Habitat Regulations

Habitats Regulations

A number of changes have been made to Habitats Regulations that increase the legal protection given to protected species wherever they are found in England. This will have implications for how woodlands are managed and forestry operations carried out. Since 1994 it has been an offence, under these Regulations, to deliberately kill or cause significant disturbance to a protected species, or to deliberately destroy their eggs. It has also been an offence to 'damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place' used by them (such as a bat roost in a tree or a dormouse nest on the woodland floor).

However, the level of protection has recently been increased to ensure it complies with the EU Habitats Directive, as set out to the UK Government following a judgement in the European Court of Justice (ECJ). This judgement set the UK Government a tight deadline for incorporating the ECJ ruling into law.

The amended regulation will include as an offence any damage or destruction of a breeding site or resting place. Previously if damage was 'an incidental result of a lawful operation' and reasonable precautions had been taken to avoid it, it would not have been an offence. Therefore there is a risk of woodland operators committing an offence if they have not carried out planned operations carefully, with the necessary checks and sought a license where required.

Woodland managers will need to consider the presence of protected species and follow good practice guidance to avoid committing an offence. In some cases management practices may need to be modified or rescheduled to a less sensitive time of year, and where this is not possible or adequate then operators may need to apply for a licence to remain within the law. Most activities will be able to continue without the need for a licence through the following of good practice guidance.

For guidance see the Forestry Commission & Natural England websites.

http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-75TJU5

http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/conservation/wildlife-management-licensing/docs/Guidance-land-managers-dormice.pdf

END NOTE: This information has been published by the Forestry Commission in an effort to provide guidance for woodland management in areas where dormice may be present. The management guidelines will be discussed by dormouse experts at the next BAP meeting and an agreed 'Best Practice Guide' will be issued in 2008.

PAT MORRIS

Training courses and news

DO YOU NEED HELP?

We regularly get requests from people keen to help out at monitoring sites in the NDMP. If you feel you would like some extra help at your site please do let us know, we can then put you in touch with any willing helpers in your area. Contact Susan at susan@ptes.org or call her on 020 7498 4533.

ONLINE DATA ENTRY AND NEW PTES WEBSITE

Several years ago we tried to set-up an on-line system for entering NDMP dormouse records. Unfortunately, the system never worked satisfactory so we had to ditch it. But in the New Year we are going to try again. Hopefully the on-line data entry system will be up and running in 2008 for those who would like to submit data this way. We will keep you informed of our progress.

Also early in 2008 PTES will launch a new website which will have pages dedicated to the dormouse. Why not pay the new site a visit www.ptes.org

DORMOUSE ECOLOGY AND CONSERVATION COURSES

Janice Whittington will be running three Dormouse Ecology and Conservation days next year on 29th May, 20th September and 15th October 2008. All at Hallsannery Field Centre, Bideford, Devon. The cost for the day is £50 per person. Self catering accommodation is available at the field centre from £20 per person per night. For further details contact Janice at janwhittington@yahoo.co.uk

Each year PTES runs a day course on how to manage woods for dormice taught by Dr Pat Morris. These days are held at a monitoring site which has ideally a classroom on site or very nearby. We would like to hold these days in different parts of the country so giving everyone who would like come along the opportunity. We are therefore looking for venues for the day. If you would be interested in hosting one of these days please get in touch with Susan Sharafi at susan@ptes.org or call 020 7498 4533.

Throughout the year the Mammal Society runs a number of courses on dormouse ecology and conservation and dormice and development. For further details visit their website http://www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal/workshops.shtml

DORMOUSE DISCUSSION FORUM

The dormouse discussion forum has now been going for just six months and is proving very popular with its 110 members. A variety of topics are being discussed such as nest box designs, nesting materials, bats in boxes, effects of escaped wild boar on hibernating dormice, dormice in conifers and even dormouse cuddly toys. Below are some snippets from the forum. If you would like to get involved with the forum please contact Susan at susan@ptes.org

Marital responsibilities

Anyone studied which partner builds the breeding nest? Do males build several and offer them for inspection (which might explain preponderance of males in boxes)? Do females build, or both? I have 'watched' a male building a nest, apparently alone, but don't yet know if it will be used for breeding.

During our survey work we have discovered that males tend to generally create quite a haphazard nest, with a leaf here or there, where as females take time with the weaving! We are able almost to sex the dormouse just by looking at the nest, if they are on there own! I am sure there will be a lot of exceptions to these observations!!

I would be wary of assuming that the current occupant made the nest. I have had five different dormice in one box over a period of 3 months.

Wood mouse numbers

Having just completed our August monitoring - amazed to find many more wood mice than ever before - I know that nationally it is a good year - anyone else experienced an exceptional year for wood mice. We did find a dormouse nest with just 2 babies but our dormice numbers seem well down on any other year - anyone finding the same?

I have found more wood mice this year during Longworth trapping, but not noticed any increase in boxes, but I have certainly found more yellow necked in boxes this year.