SUMMER 2007

the dormouse monitor

the newsletter of the national dormouse monitoring programme

INSIDE

Welcome

Welcome to the summer issue of the Dormouse Monitor. We hope you can spare a few moments from checking your nest boxes to sit back, relax and enjoy this bumper packed issue. Paul Bright reports on the 2006 records and it looks like 2006 was a much better year for dormice than 2005. Let's hope this is also the case this year; we have already had an encouraging start with many monitors finding litters much earlier than usual. On the back page you will find an item about the new Dormouse Discussion Forum where this very topic is being hotly discussed.

Turn to page 8 and read about the pioneering work of the North West Dormouse Partnership looking into dormouse population genetics. There is also a fascinating report by Lithuanian scientists on the interactions between hazel, edible and forest dormice, and birds. Plus a cautionary tale of an encounter with hornets – so please take care out there.

We are so grateful to everyone who goes out and collects the data for the NDMP. Some sites have been monitored now for nearly 20 years, that is quite a commitment.

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 Paul Bright.
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Joining the dots in Cheddar

At a dormouse BAP focus group meeting in 2003, one of the targets identified for the future was to try to reconnect dormouse populations that had been isolated in an increasingly fragmented countryside. Habitat fragmentation is one of the biggest problems facing not only dormice but many species around the world. Trying to reconnect the countryside is one of the key targets that we hope will benefit dormice.

I was fired up by the idea and hatched a plan to trial this work and see just how difficult it would be. In the Cheddar area we have two populations of dormice, one living in and around Cheddar Gorge and the other living on either side of the less well known and less dramatic Shipham Gorge. The dormice are divided by the village of Cheddar, a large quarry and the lack of hedgerow connectivity on the Mendip Plateau.

I enlisted the help of a friend, Pernille Olsen, and contacted the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) locally to see if they could help by trying to persuade farmers to plant more trees. FWAG were delighted as they were in the middle of seeking funding for a project to provide hedgerow links for greater horseshoe bats. The dormouse was their 'panda' they explained to me. Not because, like the panda, it could climb trees but because it was attractive and iconic and would enthral farmers' children to persuade their parents to help with its conservation.

FWAG produced a leaflet and started knocking on farmhouse doors. Meanwhile Pernille had gathered a group of willing volunteers from the Somerset Mammal Group, one of The Mammal Society's local groups. In the spring of 2004, funded by the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), they put up dormouse tubes in appropriate hedgerows and scrub to find out how far the dormice had ventured from their woodland strongholds and just how big or small the gap between the two populations actually was.

What we found was that dormice had travelled about 50 metres away from the woodlands, along even the poorest hedgerow, and then they stopped. Unless there was a clump of bushes or somewhere a dormouse could live for any length of time, this was as far as they would go. In the quarry, incidentally, they reached the edge of the main access road where a nest was found inside a dormouse tube even though the outside of it was coated with a thick film of limestone dust. The tube waved and shook in the turbulence of every passing lorry.

Meanwhile FWAG officers were meeting some resistance as many of the Mendip field boundaries are dry stone walls and clearly planting hedgerows alongside these was not a great idea. However, towards the end of 2006 we received the good news that Hanson, the quarry company, had agreed to plant the necessary hedgerow links around the fringes of the quarry which would finally reconnect the dormouse populations previously isolated by the two Gorges.

So what have we learned from this pilot study? Firstly that operating at a landscape scale in the wider countryside takes a long time. To be effective you need staff who can focus on the project full time. The actual cost of planting and maintaining the links and monitoring them afterwards is comparatively small; the higher cost is in the co-ordination and persuasion of local landowners and farmers.

Now the Mendip Hills AONB is working on a new project looking into how much dormice use stone walls for connectivity. When Paul Bright was a student, researching dormice, one animal turned up at the local farm he was living in. Short of flying there or running straight across the open fields, it must have come along one of the walls. The Somerset Wildlife Trust has just appointed two people to its new Living Landscapes project with the aim of renewing landscape connectivity. With their help we are now trying to link the dormice from the two gorges to another population in another gorge, Burrington Coomb.

Michael Woods
Chairman, The Mammal Society

Ever been bitten by a dormouse?

Paul Bright wanted to carry out a small survey on how often monitors are bitten by dormice and last year asked us all to keep a tally. Paul told us that, after all these years working with dormice, he had only been bitten hard enough to draw blood on one occassion, and that was by a female whose young were making distress calls.

Simone Bullion, from Suffolk, contacted us to say that she gets bitten about once a year, usually by young, solitary males! And Simone has been monitoring five different sites for the past seven years. She has only been bitten once where it actually drew blood and had to stop to put a plaster on because it was flowing so freely!

According to Paul, the difference could be due to the sex of the handler. Some mammals can certainly tell the difference. Rest assured Simone, there are people who are bitten much more often than you. If we get sufficient responses we will do a little analysis.

Last year I was bitten too. I had put my finger into a well made dormouse nest and was a little surprised to feel something giving the top of my nail a quick sharp bite. On further investigation I found a dormouse mother with a litter of pinkies, so I left them alone without any further disturbance.

Thank you everyone who kept a record of any biting dormice that you came across last year. If you didn't put a note on your recording forms please email me at susan@ptes.org. And please keep a note this year too.

Susan Sharafi, PTES

Dormice do not seem to bite handlers as often as other small mammals - or is this a myth?

IAN WHITE

Or stung by a hornet?

We had heard tales from other dormouse monitors that the European hornet *Vespa crabro* had been increasing its range throughout the UK, to such an extent that one site in Northamptonshire is no longer being monitored due to them taking over several boxes.

However hornets were far from our minds when four of us from PTES carried out our annual check at a woodland in Warwickshire. The wood had fallen out of management and the habitat was poor and relatively open. After an hour of finding no dormice we spied a box with an obvious wasp or hornet nest protruding below. Actually it was more nest than box! We crowded round the box and all was relatively quiet, with just a couple of large hornets circling the box. As we began to take photos the trouble began. Two more insects immediately appeared. Can hornets count? It appeared so but we had little time to contemplate the thought as they were suddenly attacking us. I had one that stung me repeatedly on the top of my head like a pneumatic drill pounding my skull. My colleague had one tangled in her hair and was getting increasingly agitated by the constant whine of its presence. The audible similarity of the noise with the motorbike of the same name was uncanny. My other two colleagues had disappeared to wrestle with torments of their own. And then just as suddenly as it began, the attack was over and we were left nursing sore heads and damaged pride, assessing our stupidity and counting our blessings. What if instead of four we had had to contend with 4,000 hornets? Why did so few attack? These are questions which should be answered by a braver soul than I.

We carried on with our check and found that several more boxes had been taken over by hornets. We didn't find a single dormouse or nest that day. Do dormice avoid areas of high hornet density? Hornets are clearly a problem in some woods and care needs to be taken. If in doubt don't open the box. I doubt a dormouse will take on a hornet and neither should you.

Ian White, PTES

Hornets nests have also been found in bat boxes, higher up in trees.

PTES

Make your own nest tubes

The dormouse nest tubes developed by Pat Morris are a versatile tool for surveying a wide range of habitats. The tubes available from The Mammal Society were designed primarily for rigorous systematic surveys and their size was purposely chosen to discourage their use as breeding sites (which would distort the survey results). These tubes can also be used in a less sophisticated way merely to detect the presence of dormice, particularly in habitats where it would be difficult to install nest boxes. We are using them in this manner to locate dormice in an area of heathland. During the course of this work we have been experimenting with alternative devices and found a very effective adaptation of the ubiquitous one-litre drink cartons which are thrown away in their thousands every day.

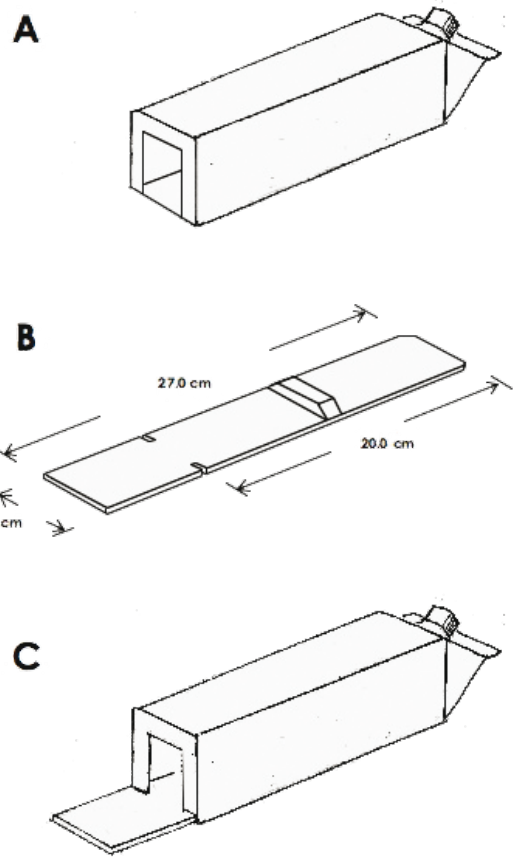
Five of these prototype nest cartons were installed in March 2006 in a gorse thicket (see below) in which we had found dormice the previous year. The cartons were checked monthly from April to November. The first nest appeared in August and two more appeared in September, one of which contained two juveniles. As we have found previously, the dormouse nests in this heathy area consist of a hollow core of fine dry grass wrapped in dead bracken fronds. The dormice clearly approve of the cartons. They are by design completely waterproof and the presence of juveniles may indicate that there is enough room in them for the animals to breed.

The cartons can be made less conspicuous (and given added protection) by coating them with blackboard paint and are supported by thin wire loops, as with nest tubes.

To prepare the nest cartons first cut a rectangular hole in the base of a dry empty drink carton leaving a 1cm border on three sides (A). The hole must be no less than 6cm x 5cm in size.

Next prepare the 'floor board' by taking a piece of plywood 27cm x 6.5cm and trim the corners at one end (this improves the fit of the end of the board against the top of the carton). Next, cut a notch on either side of the board about 20cm from the bevelled end. (The dimensions of cartons can vary slightly so it is advisable to check where the notches need to be by standing the carton on the board).

The notches need to be 1cm long and 0.2cm wide. Finally, glue a small 'step' about half-way between the notches and the end of the board. This is made from 8mm square dowelling and is bevelled as shown. The completed floor board can now be fitted to the carton by slotting it into the hole in the carton diagonally and sliding it in until the notches can engage with the border pieces. The board can then be flattened against what is now the floor of the nest carton (C), locked in place by the notches.



As an added precaution the bevelled end of the board is fixed to the floor of the carton by means of a drawing pin inserted from the outside. The floor board can be removed by removing the pin, tilting to disengage the notches and sliding it out.

In our experience, the cartons are robust and stay dry throughout the season if installed securely in a sheltered position, with the carton tilted down towards the open end. We find that the spout serves as a ready-made peephole for checking the contents with minimum disturbance, giving a clear view through the body of the carton. We also find that the brightly coloured lids aid location in dense vegetation.

From these early results the cartons show promise as a cheap and effective exploratory tool for sampling potential dormouse habitats. With their simple construction from readily available materials, they offer easy access to this type of investigation which has already widened our insight into the diversity of territory that dormice will inhabit.

Martin Anderson and Norman Dale Blean Woods NNR, Canterbury

MARTIN ANDERSON AND NORMAN DALE

NDMP - 2006 results

With the current astonishingly pluvial summer pouring relentlessly on, it's hard to remember just how fantastically warm and dry the summer was in 2006. Assuming that dry soil conditions didn't diminish the availability or quality of dormouse foods too much, then – for once – dormice in Britain had no excuse not to do well.

And do well they did. A record 4,881 dormice were handled by the NDMP in 2006. 39g was the heaviest weight recorded and two dormice tipped the scales at this weight in October. 329 of the dormice found were torpid. 72 dead dormice were also recorded. Unfortunately, at 37 sites no dormice or nests were found.

Scanning the data, it seems that litters were born early in 2006. The first litters were recorded on the 25th May. We know from the NDMP that June and July temperatures affect the number of viable young present in the autumn. So last summer's fine weather should certainly have led to more litters and better survival. It's likely that a higher than average number of females had second litters too. However some or all of these measures of dormouse success are also influenced by local population density. Thus if your dormice did not breed so successfully last year it may be because there were lots of them around at your site in autumn 2005 (higher densities in autumn lead to lower over winter survival).

The list of 'other' (obviously of little significance) species found in the nestboxes is also interesting. Monitors from 129 sites returned records for other mammals found in dormouse nestboxes, the most numerous species being the wood mouse. There were several unexpected lodgers in the boxes. These included weasels, edible dormice, water shrew, toads and - the most unusual - a slow worm! Bumble bees, wasps, hornets, yellow underwing moths, slugs, snails, woodlice, earwigs, blue tits, great tits, pied flycatchers and wrens were also noted.

Year	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001
Sites	211	178	167	159	141	139
Visits	1088	971	890	919	875	810
Dormice	4,881	3,155	4,296	3,099	2,644	2,646

Table 1 Number of dormice recorded over the last six years

People often worry about predators getting into boxes but in all the thousands examined in 2006 only two weasels were found. I've still never seen a weasel in a nest box, more's the pity. Conversely, it strikes me that in total there were rather a lot of bats in 2006. Maybe this is simply because nest boxes have often been up for many years now and bats have found them? And finally, what on earth was a water shrew doing in a dormouse nestbox!

Summer torpor

I looked closely at torpor in hazel dormice some years ago and Fiona Sanderson used the NDMP to do so too. What we found was, I think, one of the most interesting aspects of dormouse life history. In Britain, at least, and as everyone regularly handling dormice knows, torpor is a strongly seasonal phenomenon: it's most prevalent in spring and early summer (April-early July), before the dormouse's preferred food becomes really abundant in August and September.

It has been reported from Russia and elsewhere that torpor increases in the autumn – a sort of gradual move into hibernation. This is not what generally happens in Britain, except in small juveniles in late October and November. There are two reasons to suspect that lack of torpor in autumn is probably the norm. Firstly you cannot readily digest and assimilate last night's feast of hazel nuts if your body is cold and torpid. Secondly as dormice get fatter and fatter in the autumn (and last autumn some of them were real monsters) the costs of re-warming from torpor – re-heating all of that fat – will increase, making torpor less of an economic proposition.

As well as season, torpor is very strongly linked to weather. The NDMP data and our work with temperature loggers shows a very strong relationship with temperature; the colder it is at night, the more likely dormice are to go torpid. That there is a strong environmental factor influencing torpor is also shown by the fact that at any box check most dormice are torpid or most are not. I found that dormice go torpid as soon as they return from their night's activity (when it's cold) and then re-warm again around mid-day or early afternoon (when, obviously it's warmest). They are not stupid these dormice.

What really clinches the conclusion that torpor is a short-term mechanism to maintain energy balance is this: I found there is a near perfect inverse relationship (and how often do you find those in ecology?) between the length of time a dormouse has been out clubbing (they do you know) and the length of subsequent day-time torpor (some behaviours are universal across the animal kingdom). In other words, the less time dormice have spent out foraging the longer is their subsequent period of torpor. So, the use of torpor is clearly a highly developed and sensitive mechanism enabling dormice to prosper when otherwise they would not. In fact I can think of lots of good reasons for adopting it myself…

Dr Paul Bright, RHUL

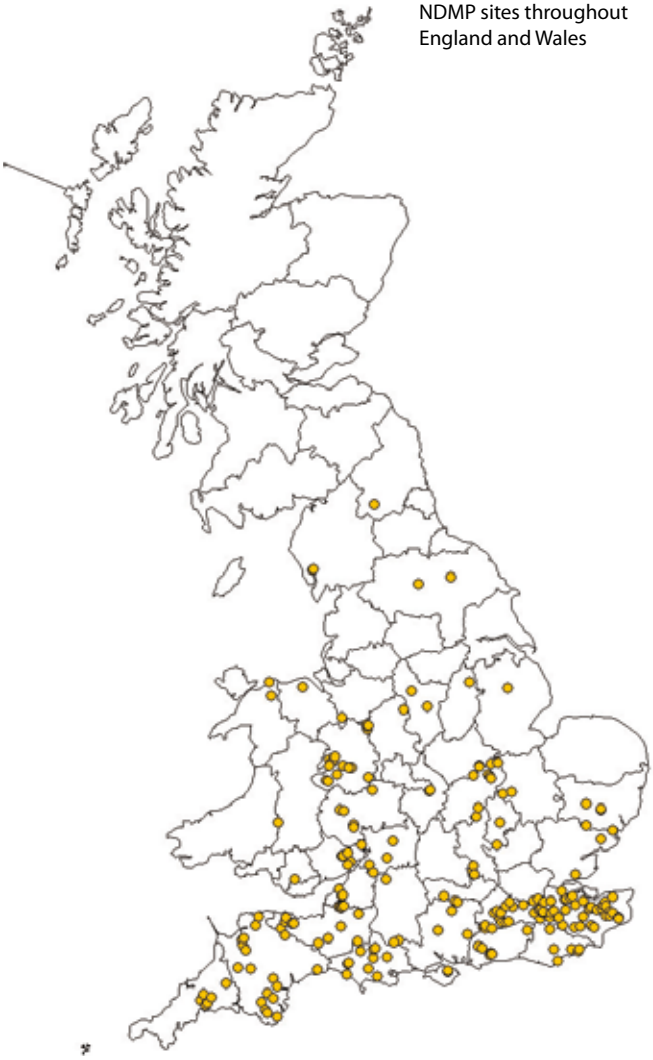
IAN WHITE

NDMP - an overview

Thanks to all your hard work over the past few years we now have the most comprehensive monitoring scheme of any mammal in the UK. We thought you'd like to know a little more about the NDMP and the various sites within it.

We now have over 200 sites being monitored. Although this sounds like a lot, the vast majority of those are within six counties (see table right).

We're keen to increase the number of monitoring sites in counties with less than five if we can. We would also like to increase the number of different types of habitat that are being monitored. The majority of sites are broad-leaved woodland - the type of site we know that dormice prefer. However, we also know that they are found in other habitats too, like heathland and conifer woodlands. Please let us know if you know of any such sites and are able to monitor them.



NDMP sites throughout England and Wales

NDMP sites per county	
Berkshire	1
Cheshire	1
Isle of Wight	1
Lincolnshire	1
Northumberland	1
Nottinghamshire	1
Oxfordshire	1
Powys	1
Rhondda	1
Wiltshire	1
Flintshire	1
Bedfordshire	2
Cumbria	2
Derbyshire	2
Gwynedd	2
Monmouthshire	2
North Yorkshire	2
Rutland	2
Warwickshire	2
Buckinghamshire	3
Cambridgeshire	3
Essex	4
Suffolk	4
Hampshire	5
Staffordshire	5
Cornwall	6
East Sussex	6
Herefordshire & Worcestershire	6
Northants	6
West Sussex	6
Gloucestershire	7
Shropshire	13
Dorset	14
Surrey	14
Devon	16
Somerset	20
Kent	43
Total in England	203
Total in Wales	8
Total	211

HIGHWAYS AGENCY (TAKEN BY MARY HOLMES, NICHOLAS PEARSON ASSOCIATES)

Dormouse DNA project in Cheshire...

The North West Dormouse Partnership Project, conceived in 2004, brought together parties involved in dormouse monitoring in Cheshire and north east Wales. Working together, a team of dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers, veterinary experts from Chester Zoo and scientists from Liverpool University have been identifying individual dormice and studying them. Dormice have been chipped previously at all the release sites so that they can be recognised when caught in future. We can then tell how far a single animal has travelled and how old it is too. This project is the first in the UK to look at dormouse population genetics, enabling us to find out so much more about both individuals and populations as a whole.

Planning for this project started in early 2005, with the first fieldwork being carried out in May. The project is expected to run until at least 2008. The partners are Cheshire Wildlife Trust, North Wales Wildlife Trust, Forestry Commission Wales, Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), Denbighshire County Council, Chester Zoo, Natural England and North East Wales Wildlife.

Scientists at Liverpool University became involved in the partnership in 2006. They planned to develop genetic profiles of individual dormice to quantify their genetic relationships. This information can be used in future to measure unknown ecological parameters such as how far individual animals disperse between areas, the parentage of litters and social structure of dormice, which are all nearly impossible to measure using standard field techniques. We can also see if inbreeding, population bottlenecks and loss of genetic diversity are, or will be, a problem due to habitat fragmentation.

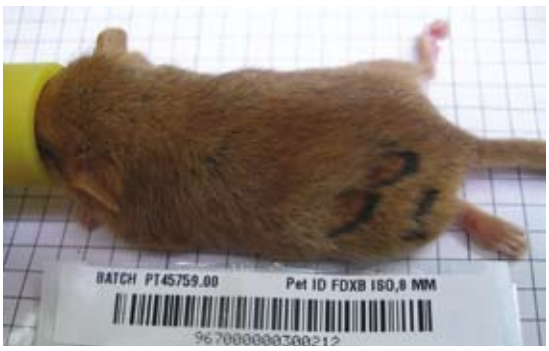
Since it is vital that the samples used for genetic work can be collected from dormice without causing injury or undue stress, Liverpool University tested whether genetic material can be obtained from hair samples and oral swabs taken by the North West Dormouse Partnership in 2006. Initial results are very encouraging, indicating

■ **LEFT** Vets from Chester Zoo anaethetise dormice in the field.

■ **ABOVE** DNA swabs are extracted from each animal.

■ **RIGHT** An 8mm ID chip is inserted into the scruff of each animal for future identification.

■ **BELOW** Id photos are taken whilst animals are resusitated with oxygen.



NORTH WEST DORMOUSE PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

...continued

that enough DNA to make genetic profiles can be extracted from hair. Oral swabs seem to work too, but hair samples are proving better.

A large number of the genetic markers (microsatellites), that are necessary to analyse parentage, have already been detected. These consist of a short (2-6 base pair) motif that is repeated many times. Microsatellites are typically thought of as 'junk DNA' because they do not have a known function. Because of this the number of repeat units at a specific microsatellite locus can, and often does, vary between different individuals. By determining the lengths of many microsatellite loci in an individual we create a unique 'genetic fingerprint' for that individual – this is the type of genetic profiling used for forensic analyses in humans. Testing and optimising of the microsatellites is in progress now.

Liverpool University scientists are very keen to include samples from other sites in their genetic studies to provide information on how isolated dormouse populations are, and to contribute to our understanding of habitats that act as barriers to dormouse dispersal. Please get in touch with Phill Watts if you would be willing to collect hair samples during your monitoring sessions. Instructions for taking, storing, and sending samples will be provided.

Partnership contact:
Sarah Bird
Biodiversity Officer
Chester Zoo
s.bird@chesterzoo.org

Volunteers contact:
Sue Tatman
Cheshire Wildlife Trust
statman@cheshirewt.cix.co.uk

Genetic analysis contact:
Phill Watts
University of Liverpool.
P.C.Watts@liverpool.ac.uk
Tel: 0151 795 4384

Nest construction - further studies

Following on from John Prince's study into what materials dormice in Little Linford Wood were using to build their nests, a new study is being carried out by a masters student in zoo conservation biology at Plymouth University. Nikki Brown is working on a project in collaboration with Paignton Zoo. Her study is looking into the nest building behaviour and nest material preferences of captive dormice. In particular she is hoping to:

- measure the activity levels of dormice each night when building the nest to find out how long is spent resting, travelling and feeding
- find out how long it takes a dormouse to build a nest
- find out how long a dormouse spends foraging for nesting material
- see how long is spent manipulating these materials i.e. shredding
- see how long is spent transporting the different materials to the nest site
- and find out what nesting materials they prefer.

Nikki is also going to examine and compare any differences in the composition and structure of captive and wild dormice nests. She will look into what proportion and mass of materials are used, the structural lay out of the nest, and which materials are used for the inside, outside and in-between layers.

If you have any spare nests or are collecting any nest tubes up and can send the contents to Nikki it would add valuable information to her project. Please post them to her at 62 Edith Avenue, Plymouth, St Judes, Devon, PL4 8TJ by mid August. If you can also provide the location and nearest available plant species too, that would be useful. You can contact Nikki on little_nikkinz@hotmail.com or call Nida on 020 7498 4533 for information.

Many different kinds of material have been used in dormouse nests but the most common remains honeysuckle.

PTES

Interactions between dormice and birds

We have often wondered what, if any, impact our dormice are having on birds that nest in the dormouse nest boxes we put up. Most of us will have experienced finding numerous old blue tit nests in the boxes and, if we check early enough, plenty of blue tit nestlings. Scientists in Lithuania have been studying the impact that three species of dormice – hazel, edible and forest – are having on the bird species that they share their nest boxes with, in particular pied flycatchers and great tits. (Although garden dormice are historically recorded in Lithuania they weren't found in any of the sites during the checks carried out for this study.)

Edible dormice (above) were found in 19 starlings' nests but there was no evidence of them preying on the eggs or nestlings.

BOTH IMAGES ELIANA SEVIANU

Five different sites were chosen, four of which appeared to have only one dormouse species present, though it isn't clear if this was a result of the size of the nest box being used or not. Two different sizes of bird nest boxes were used – tit and starling boxes. The tit boxes have entrance holes of 35mm and the starling boxes entrances holes are 45mm. The fifth woodland has both hazel and edible dormice present. The data used for the analysis were collected by various scientists over differing periods, some as long ago as 1978; only data collected in spring was used for the analysis.

The results showed that hazel dormice only destroyed 6.6% of 3,807 bird nests containing eggs at two of the study sites. They also occupied nests of pied flycatcher without eggs or nests with incomplete clutches most often, ate eggs that hadn't hatched, but did not kill or bite nestlings and adult birds. Surprisingly hazel dormice were very seldom found in nest boxes that contained tits' nests. There were also plenty of times that hazel dormice were recorded occupying nests with some or all of the birds' eggs found intact. However, they were often noticed revisiting these nests on subsequent occasions and the number of intact eggs decreased. However the impact wasn't always one way. Several dead hazel dormice were found during the spring and autumn, with wounds on their heads and other parts of their bodies. It is thought they were killed by great tits whilst the animals were in torpor.

Edible dormice destroyed 14.3% of 498 bird nests with eggs or nestlings at two study sites, mostly nests of pied flycatchers and great tits. As well as being recorded eating the birds' eggs, edible dormice also killed and ate the nestlings and adult birds, leaving just bones and feathers in the nests. Previous studies on the interactions between dormice and birds, carried out in the eighties and early nineties, suggested that edible dormice have a lower impact on birds because they do not emerge and become active until comparatively later. In years they've been recorded out and about earlier in the season they appear to be having more of an impact on hole-nesting birds.

Forest dormice made the biggest impact on nesting birds. They destroyed 20.5% of 171 nests with eggs or nestlings, ate eggs and killed and ate nestlings and adult birds. They were found more often killing and eating adults birds either breeding or just looking for nest sites than taking the eggs.

Competition obviously exists between European populations of dormice and birds for nesting sites as well as there being a predatory relationship too. Here in the UK we also hear many anecdotal stories about whether or not dormice will nest in boxes previously used by wood mice or if they have an impact on our blue tit numbers. It would be interesting to look further into how hazel dormice in England and Wales interact with bird and other mammal species that use the same nest boxes and answer some of our questions.

Taken from a report written by Rimvydas Juskaitis. Please email nida@ptes.org for a full copy of the paper.

Bramley Frith update

Bramley Frith, a 36-hectare site of mixed ancient woodland and meadows, owned by the National Grid, has been an important site for dormice since the population started being monitored in 1991. Not only was it one of the first monitoring sites to be set up but it is also a wonderful wildlife site from many other points of view and the Environmental Education Centre at the centre of the site hosted school trips and ran courses to train land managers and rangers about dormouse ecology.

National Grid and the local electricity supplier, Scottish and Southern Energy, are now developing the site to meet the growing demand for electricity in north Hampshire and south Berkshire.

How will this work impact upon the dormice? Approximately 0.5ha of ancient woodland and other areas will be developed. National Grid will be transplanting as many coppice stools as possible to other locations within the site and undertaking supplementary planting, but unfortunately this is unlikely to fully compensate for the damage done by opening up the central part of the wood even more than it is now.

The dormice are still being monitored and National Grid have said that they will ensure the monitoring will continue once the development finishes in 2010. We will let you know from the results how the dormice are being affected.

National Grid are installing two supergrid transformers at Bramley Frith to increase the capacity of the substation.

PTES

Does deer fencing benefit dormice?

Many of you are only too well aware of the damage done to much woodland understorey by deer. We want to find out whether deer fencing improves habitat within a woodland to such an extent that these areas are more productive and therefore have higher numbers of dormice.

BTO is looking at ground nesting bird numbers in deer-fenced areas to answer this very question at last year's release site, Bradfield Woods in Suffolk.

We're gathering dormouse monitoring results from similar woods and would like to hear from you if you have nest boxes up in a wood that has certain coupes fenced from deer or know of a partially deer-fenced woodland that you could put nest boxes up in.

Please call Nida on 020 7498 4533 or email nida@ptes.org

Deer fencing may improve habitat enough to increase dormouse numbers.

PTES

Training courses and news

HOW TO MANAGE WOODS FOR DORMICE

This year PTES will be running this popular one-day course, taught by Pat Morris, twice. On Wednesday 3rd October the course will be held near Ruthin in north Wales and on Wednesday 17th October near Hastings in East Sussex. For further details and a booking form please contact Susan at susan@ptes.org or call 020 7498 4555. Please state whether you would like further details on the course in north Wales or East Sussex. The cost for the day is £50 per person (£5 discount for dormouse monitors submitting data to the NDMP).

DORMOUSE ECOLOGY AND CONSERVATION COURSES

These Mammal Society courses provide an excellent first step in the licensing process, giving you a good grounding in dormouse biology and experience in the field actually handling dormice. They are equally useful for those wanting to find out more about dormice as they are for people who want to train for a licence. This year the courses are being held in Cheddar (the original 'home' of dormouse research over the past 20 years) and Kent. Next year we are hoping to spread our geographical wings to the Midlands/ Welsh Borders and Wales.

If you would like to become a Mammal Society trainer or book on a course please call the Training Officer, Alison Tutt, on 01278 641747 or visit www.mammal.org.uk.

LICENSING UPDATE

The law is about to change for people who keep dead dormice or their skins for training purposes. To be in possession of all or part of a European Protected Species, such as a dormouse, acquired since 1994, you will now require a licence. If you already hold a dormouse licence, then possessing a reasonable number of such exhibits will be included on the document in future. If you happen to have a great number of dormouse parts then a special licence will be required.

DORMOUSE DISCUSSION FORUM

By popular request the NDMP Dormouse Discussion Forum was started in June. It has been set up as a restricted Google Group and only invited members can view the pages. It is a means for monitors and others with an interest in dormouse conservation to share experiences, ask for advice and generally talk dormice. At present it has over 80 members and topics for discussion covered so far include types of nesting material used, whether early litters are being seen this year, do wood mice put dormice off using nest boxes and even the case of the snoring dormouse! Below is a taster of some of the discussions going on.

If you would like to join in the forum contact Susan at susan@ptes.org

Early litters...

At our May count in Cheshire we found a female with pink babies. I have never seen a female with young this early in the year before. Has anyone else had a similar experience?

I do a dormouse count in north Devon, on a site on the edge of Exmoor. I have recorded young in April before and also a nest of young in November a couple of years ago, I guess it just depends on the conditions. I was worried about the November young so went out again in December to find them doing very well and big enough to survive what was left of the winter.

I monitor a wood in Essex and we didn't find any babies at our May check but in June we found a single youngster of approx three weeks old. It was in a box with mum and another (non-lactating) adult female. This is only the second year that we've had boxes up. We didn't find babies this early last year. Perhaps that hot spell back in April has something to do with it?

Hello, I monitor boxes on the Sussex /Surrey border and have never found young in May but have in November. There seems to be a lot we have to learn about these little creatures - fascinating!

I do recall, five yeas ago, while looking in a box on the 19th December, finding a female with five young which were still pink and could have only been born recently. Unfortunately, it snowed three days later. However, this did raise the question of what the dormice were feeding on at that time.

At Roudsea, South Lakes, we don't find young before August (September in '05) by which time they are well developed and very active!

On 15th May at the site I monitor on the Isle of Wight we found 27 adult dormice. Two females had pink babies and one female was pregnant. On our June check we found 18 adults but no young.

I found pink young in a nest box in Cornwall on May 29th this year. It's obviously nothing to do with being in the deep south, as I had thought.