

Farm rodent control – how to protect dormice

The common or hazel dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius* is one of the United Kingdom's rarest mammals. It is fully protected by European and British legislation. This animal is absent from Scotland and Northern Ireland and there are only sparse populations in Wales and some northern counties. In southern England it is more common, but even in ideal habitat its population density is just 10 adults per hectare.

Ecology

The dormouse is a nocturnal species and is rarely seen, but it can be recognised by its orange/yellow fur and its thick, fur-covered tail. Adults are 11-16 cm from nose to tail. Dormice spend most of their time in the tree and shrub layer where they feed on fruits, flowers, insects, seeds and nuts. They sleep by day in disused birds' nests or tree hollows, or occasionally in bird or bat boxes. Their breeding period is from June to September and they nest above ground, often in a tightly woven ball of honeysuckle suspended in the shrub layer. Dormice generally only spend time on the ground during the hibernation period from October to May and their hibernation nests are located under logs, in leaf litter, or at the base of coppice stools and thick hedges. The optimum habitat for dormice is mixed deciduous woodland or overgrown hedgerows with plenty of oak or hazel and a good bramble or honeysuckle understorey.

Protection for the dormouse

The dormouse is protected by both the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 and the Conservation (Natural Habitats & c.) Regulations 1994. It is an offence, with certain exceptions, to deliberately disturb, capture, kill or injure a dormouse or to damage or destroy a nesting place. It is also an offence to keep, transport, sell or exchange any live or dead dormouse.



Dormouse on stump

Rodent control on farms and holdings

Dormice would be extremely unlikely to occupy farm buildings, although they could inhabit scrub and woodland around the outside. They rarely forage at ground level, so using baits and traps in and around the farm buildings should not result in any offence being committed. Nevertheless, bait points

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should be adequately protected from non-target species according to the instructions on the label of the rodenticide product. Traps should be positioned where there is evidence of rat and house mouse activity, for example on well-used rat runs around the farm buildings or along the inside walls.

If bait or traps do need to be placed along ditches and hedgerows surrounding the farm buildings, additional consideration should be given to the possibility of dormice and other protected wildlife being adversely affected. Carrying out rodent control in winter should minimise risks to dormice.

Scrub clearance for rodent control, or any other purpose, could result in destruction of dormouse habitat and disturbance to nesting animals. This work, if required, should be carried out in late autumn and winter to avoid the nesting period for dormice and other protected species, such as birds.

Licensing and further information

Natural England has authority to grant licences for certain specified purposes to allow action that would otherwise be an offence under the legislation. If you are concerned that an offence might be committed please seek advice from your local Natural England team. Further information can be obtained on the Natural England website at www.naturalengland.org.uk/conservation/wildlife-management-licensing or by contacting the Wildlife Management and Licensing Service on 0845 6014523 (local rate).

If you are not sure which wildlife species inhabit your property and surrounding areas, you can contact your local Natural England team for advice and information by visiting www.naturalengland.org.uk.

This information note was produced by Defra and Natural England's Wildlife Management & Licensing Service.

