



Dormouse

Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Species English Name (Scientific name)

DORMOUSE (MUSCARDINUS AVELLANARIUS)

Associated Habitat Action Plans:

Woodland



Ecology

Appearance

Dormice usually weigh between 15-30g, reaching 65-85mm in length. They have a white throat, pale yellow/white fur on their underparts and brown/orange fur on their upperparts. Their thick bushy tail makes them easy to distinguish from other mouse-sized mammals.

Habitat

Dormice inhabit coppiced woodlands, deciduous woodland with scrub, and hedgerows.

Food

Dormice eat fruits, seeds, flowers and insects. However prior to hibernation nuts (chestnuts and hazelnuts) are the more important food sources.

Predators

Dormice are very fast and agile and can escape many predators such as raptors and foxes, however foxes have been known to dig up dormice while they are hibernating underground.



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Life Style

Dormice can live for up to 5 years

Dormice are nocturnal and spend the day sleeping in nests that are typically about 15cm in diameter and made from honeysuckle bark, grass, moss and leaves, woven to entirely surround the animal.

They are good climbers and spend most of their time in tree canopies.

Dormice spend the months from October to April in hibernation.

Common dormice rear one or two litters a year, typically of four young (although the litter size can range from 1-7). The young first leave the nest after four weeks, but they may remain with their mother for a further seven weeks.

Current status

Nationally, the dormouse has disappeared from most of the north of England. A Mammal Society survey in the late 1970s showed it had become extinct in 7 northern counties where it was once known to occur, including the Cheshire region.

The last known dormouse record for the Cheshire region was 1910. Presently, the dormouse occurs mainly in the south of England, where it is widespread, but often with a very patchy distribution.

The only dormice in the Cheshire region are an introduced population in the Wych Valley. This population is the result of the release of captive bred animals - 29 in 1996 and 24 in 1997.

Monitoring indicates the dormice have established themselves, with breeding occurring every year from 1996 onwards.

The population has grown steadily, with increasing numbers of juveniles recruited into the population each year. The dormice have colonized all parts of the release site and appear to be spreading along the Wych Valley. In 2002/2003 the dormice crossed the Wych Brook into Wrexham (North Wales).

The dormouse is listed on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. Listed on Appendix 3 of the Bonn Convention and Annex IVa of the EC Habitats Directive. Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (Regulation 38). It is on the UK Biodiversity Steering Group Short List of Globally Threatened/Declining Species.

Threats

- * The continual destruction of ancient semi-natural woodlands which are their required habitat.
- * The fragmentation of woodlands is a potential threat. Dormice are reluctant to cross open ground,



so are unable to move easily between woodlands (a minimum area of 20ha is required to maintain a viable population).

- * Changes in woodland management, especially the decline in long-rotation hazel coppicing.
- * The continued intrusion of cattle into woodlands, especially during winter.
- * Continual climatic variations.
- * Loss or fragmentation of hedgerows which act as dispersal corridors.

How are we helping to conserve dormice in the Cheshire region?

- * The decline of the dormouse has led Natural England to include it in their national Species Recovery Programme. This programme includes the reintroduction of dormice to a number of counties where they have been lost. Cheshire Wildlife Trust have managed the reintroduction of dormice to a woodland in the south of the Cheshire region. 300 specially designed dormice nesting boxes have been constructed and put up at the site and boxes are monitored monthly from May to October. Data from the monitoring is passed on to the National Dormouse Monitoring Scheme.
- * A dormouse nestbox sponsorship scheme has been set up, to increase awareness and raise funds. Nestboxes are being located in possible dispersal areas, to monitor expansion of the population.
- * The Wych Valley Project has been set up to promote general conservation in the area, using the dormouse as a flagship.

Objectives, targets and actions

The objectives, targets and actions to help conserve Dormice in the Cheshire region can be found on the [Biodiversity Action Reporting System \(BARS\)](#) along with full details of our progress so far.

How to find out more about dormice

BBC Wildfacts website - www.bbc.co.uk/nature/wildfacts/factfiles/263.shtml Great Nut Hunt - www.greatnuthunt.org.uk

The Mammal Society - www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal/dormouse.shtml

UK BAP for Dormice - www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=462

How can you get involved?

Sponsor a nestbox with Cheshire Wildlife Trust.

Nest boxes are an important part of the Cheshire Dormouse Project. Dormice will readily use purpose-built nest boxes. The boxes are built of wood and are similar in design to those frequently put up in gardens for small birds.



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You can be involved with the Dormouse Project by sponsoring a nest box. You can sponsor a box for yourself, or as an unusual present to someone else.

Contact details

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Mervyn Newman, Devon Wildlife Trust

References and Glossary

Bright, P. & Morris, P. (1989): A practical guide to Dormouse Conservation. The Mammal Society.

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