

Species Action Plan: Dormouse



1. Current status

The Hazel or Common dormouse has seen a dramatic decline in recent times. In the UK it is only found in England and Wales, most frequently in the South of England. It has become extinct in several counties in the last 100 years and is largely absent from Northern England, although the South West still remains a stronghold for this species.

Nationally the species is in decline. The species is undoubtedly under-recorded with efforts being focused primarily on 'a-typical' dormouse habitat, such as hazel coppice broadleaved woodland and species-rich hedgerows. Dormice are frequently being recorded in coastal scrub, culm grassland, molina grassland and scrub, and coniferous plantations. Dormice that inhabit these coniferous plantations are believed to be relic populations that inhabited ancient woodlands, prior to commercial afforestation, termed, Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS).

The species hibernates during the winter months (November – March) with the breeding season during the months of July to September. Dormice rely on a number of seasonally available food resources, such as flowers – particularly honeysuckle, pollen, insects, fruits, berries, ash-keys, chestnuts and particularly hazelnuts. During the dormouse's active period, they will temporarily enter a torpid state (mini-hibernation) to coincide with their seasonally available food source. This, along with their nocturnal behaviour, makes them prone to being under recorded. Recent research has shown that it is probably rather less restricted in its habitat requirements than previously thought and that searching and recording needs to be undertaken in a wider range of habitats.



Sites where species has been recorded	Designations
Roadford Lake	Local Nature Reserve

2. Current factors causing loss or decline

- Loss of habitat such as ancient broadleaved woodland, species-rich hedgerows, culm grassland and associated scrub and mature woodland of ancient origin.
- Unsuitable woodland management and fragmentation of habitat i.e. clear felling of woodlands, over management and particularly the repeated flailing of hedgerows.
- Loss of habitat connectivity between smaller woodlands via loss of hedgerows.
- Changes or cessation in silviculture practises i.e. planting of conifer woodlands, coppicing and hedgerow removal.
- Loss of habitat to development.
- Predation may not be a limiting factor. However, domestic cats can have an impact on localised populations adjacent to urbanised developments.

3. Current action

3.1 Legal status

Dormice are afforded protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Conservation Regulations under the Habitats Directive (1994). Under this legislation it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take a dormouse. It is also an offence to intentionally damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that a dormouse uses for shelter or protection (i.e. its habitat). Criminal offence carries a fine of up to £5,000 per dormouse and also carries a custodial sentence of up to six months imprisonment.

3.2 Site protection

Dormice have been recorded in three areas at Roadford Lake. The two fragmented populations exist at Southweek Wood, north of the lake and Slew Wood, south of the site below the dam. These two fragmented populations are believed to be from a larger population that existed here prior to the flooding of the dam. Records have also been found of dormice inhabiting hedgerows alongside a minor road (Gaddacome Lane, Roadford) towards the east of the site. Southweek Wood was designated a Local Nature Reserve in 2006 by West Devon Borough Council. The site is afforded legal status for this species and the habitats that it supports. The woodland is of ancient origin (> 50 – 100 years) consisting of many mature oaks and hosts an array of ancient woodland indicators, including wood sorrel and extensive bluebell carpets in the spring.

3.3 Species and population protection

The SWLT dormouse monitoring project was initiated in early 2005 and has so far identified dormouse populations within three different areas at Roadford. Over 50 dormouse boxes have been permanently erected in Southweek Wood revealing a healthy but fragmented population. However, dormouse tubes erected in Slew Wood revealed the presence of dormice in 2006 and therefore nest boxes were erected, however since then no records have been made and the boxes were moved to Coombepark Wood in March 2009. Continued monitoring of all the sites is on going.

This project is being undertaken in conjunction with the National Dormouse Monitoring Project and the data used to monitor dormouse distribution and abundance nationally.

Records are also sent to the National Biodiversity Network (NBDN) and to Natural England's representative for this species.

Woodland restoration projects have been initiated at Roadford and Lopwell Dam Local Nature Reserve for this species. One hundred honeysuckle plants were planted in Southweek Wood, Roadford LNR. Over 300 natively sourced hazel saplings along with 50 honeysuckle plants were planted in one hectare of woodland at Lopwell Dam LNR. Extensive sycamore removal was also undertaken over a three-year period at Lopwell LNR to encourage this species. Tree felling (volumes) was less than 5m³ per quarter and was undertaken within the Forestry Authority guidelines. Dormouse nest-tube surveys revealed the absence of dormice at Porth reservoir, Cornwall in 2005.

In 2008 SWLT initiated monitoring at Wimbleball Lake where a nest was discovered and in 2009 nest tubes were erected at College, Trenchford, Lopwell Dam and Burrator. Monitoring will continue throughout 2009 and 2010 at these sites.

3.4 Advisory

- Ensure that staff and managers are aware of the presence and importance of this species and are advised on appropriate management. This is particularly important in relation to silviculture and forestry operations.
- Ensure that contractors undertaking estate work are fully briefed in advance of the presence of dormice on site and that operations will not cause any detriment to the population.



Dormouse in nest box

4. SWLT objectives and targets

- Undertake detailed survey of Roadford Lake to establish other locations and extent of relic dormouse population.
- Increase the number of nest-boxes at Roadford Lake. Nesting sites are the limiting factor in dormouse population dynamics.
- Notify the statutory conservation agencies lead representative for this species on the location and extent of population.
- Ensure the long-term protection of the site along with appropriate management.
- Consider notifying or designating sites or area as a SSSI.

- Undertake a desktop study to identify historic sites for this species on all SWLT sites.
- Initiate nest-tube surveys at other suitable SWLT sites.
- Pursue Agri-environmental schemes offering grants for hedge and hedgebank restoration.
- Pursue Natural England offering grants to support dormouse conservation initiatives across the southwest.

5. SWLT action plan for dormouse

Action	Potential Partners	Target Date
Policy & Legislation		
1. Section 13 (Schedule 5) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.	Responsibility of Natural England	
2. Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c) Regulations 1994 (Regulation 38).	Responsibility of Natural England	
3. The Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW).	Responsibility of Natural England	
Site Safeguard & Management		
1. Sites supporting dormice should be identified and advice provided to site managers/rangers on appropriate management		On-going
2. Pursue Agri-environmental schemes offer grants for hedge and hedge bank restoration.	Defra	On-going
3. Pursue Natural England grants to support dormouse conservation initiatives.		On-going
4. Encourage the management of woodlands and hedgerows to maintain existent populations and prevent habitat fragmentation.		On-going
Species Management & Protection		
1. Continue SWLT nest-box monitoring project at Roadford Lake.		On-going
2. Continue woodland management at Roadford Lake for the benefit of dormice. Selective coppicing, hazel 'layering' and planting, and the planting of honeysuckle at known dormice sites.		On-going
3. Erect 50 dormouse nest-boxes in Slew wood, Roadford, monitor and include in NDMP.		2007
4. Erect dormouse nest-boxes (10 – 15) in hedgerows (Gaddacome Lane, Roadford, towards the east of the site) and monitor.		2010
Advisory		
1. Nominate Roadford Lake as an example of best practise for dormouse conservation.		2008
2. Produce summary guidance leaflet based on SWLT monitoring project and NE conservation handbook on best practise for land managers/owners etc.	SWW, NE,	2010
Future Research & Monitoring		
1. Survey areas for the presence of dormice with the aid of dormice nest-tubes on all suitable SWLT sites		2010
2. Erect dormouse nest-boxes (minimum of 50) on sites that have dormice present and include in NDMP.		2011
Communications & Publicity		
1. Ensure public awareness of the species as a key indicator of desirable woodland and hedgerow conditions.		2010
2. Produce information/articles for the general public on conservation of the species.		2010

7. Links with other action plans

This plan should be considered in conjunction with the following habitat action plans: -

- Ancient and/or species-rich hedgerows
- Purple moor grass and rush pasture
- Upland oak woodland
- Lowland beech and yew woodland

8. Useful links

UK Biodiversity Action Plan for Common/Hazel Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*):
<http://www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=462>

Regional, District, National Park and Local BAPs:
http://www.swbiodiversity.org.uk/Home_LBAP.htm

South West Regional Biodiversity Partnership:
<http://www.swbiodiversity.org.uk/index.htm>

National Biodiversity Network for Common/Hazel Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*):
<http://www.searchnbn.net/searchengine/search.jsp?tab=1&pg=1&searchTerm=Hazel%20Dormouse>

National Dormouse Monitoring Programme: <http://www.ptes.org/work/baps/hazel-dormouse.html>

Status of Species and Habitat Report for Common/Hazel Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*): http://www.ukbap.org.uk/library/Reporting_pdfs/UKListID462_2002.pdf