



COMMON DORMOUSE

Muscardinus avellenarius

1. INTRODUCTION

Made famous in Lewis Carroll's 'Alice in Wonderland' as the creature that lived in a tea pot and was always sleeping, the common dormouse is a specialised arboreal nocturnal small mammal. Its behaviour of hibernating through the winter and being active throughout the summer is an adaptation to continental climates with cold winters and hot summers. In Britain, with its maritime climate, the species exists at the edge of its geographical range and favours ancient deciduous woodland with a well-developed understorey dominated by hazel, such as former coppice.

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2. OUR OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

Target

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|----|--|-----------|
| A. | To maintain the range of dormice as recorded in 2000. | 2004-2015 |
| B. | To maintain extent and maintain / improve condition by active management for dormice at all known sites. | 2004-2015 |
| C. | Survey, prepare a plan and maintain extent and maintain / improve condition by active management for the Princethorpe woodlands cluster. | 2005 |
| D. | Key monitoring of populations at all known sites. | 2005,2010 |
| E. | Continued surveys of woodlands not covered in the 1999/2000 surveys. | 2004-2015 |

ASSOCIATED HABITAT PLANS

- Woodlands

ASSOCIATED SPECIES PLANS

3. NATIONAL BAP OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

- *Maintain dormouse populations in all the counties where they still occur (Revised)*
- *Enhance dormouse populations in all the counties where they still occur (Revised)*
- *Re-establish self-sustaining populations in at least 5 counties where they have been lost (Revised)*

Maintaining and enhancing dormouse populations in all of the counties where they still occur requires a county-based inventory, locating dormouse sites and preparing management plans that take into account dormouse needs. Sites should be listed where active management of dormice is in progress and identify further sites where appropriate action should be implemented.

4. CURRENT STATUS

Once a familiar species widespread throughout the south and west of England and Wales, the dormouse has suffered a substantial decline in numbers and distribution throughout the last century. The first national survey completed in 1993, based on survey of eaten nuts (The National Nut Hunt), was used as the flagship for the launch of the English Nature (now Natural England) Species Recovery Programme and found 334 sites with dormice in England and Wales. In Warwickshire the status of the common dormouse is, historically, poorly recorded, though we might expect that it would have been present in large deciduous semi-natural woodland that have been traditionally managed for the understorey species. Its recorded distribution in Warwickshire is rare and it is known only from a few sites.

Until a survey was carried out by English Nature in 1999 and 2000 the dormouse was thought to remain on only one site in Warwickshire (Weston Wood) which lies in the complex to the south-west of Coventry. Recently an experimental population has been introduced from Kent at the nearby Bubbenhall Wood. The 1999/2000 survey revealed another site in this area (Brandon wood) containing a dormouse population. Although this survey did not record dormice in suitable habitat in the nearby New Close, Birchley Wood and Ryton Wood, there is unconfirmed evidence of dormice at the latter location. The 1999/2001 surveys revealed dormice at 4 other locations, all of which are isolated from one another: 3 in the south of the County, Long Itchington and Ufton Woods, Wolford Wood and Whichford Wood, and a further wood to the north of the county, Kingsbury Wood. Further surveys of woods by the Warwickshire Mammal Group has revealed dormice present in Print Wood, about 2 miles from Long Itchington, a site with previously only unconfirmed anecdotal records.

4.1 Legal and Policy Status

Listed on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitat) Regulations 1994, it is evident that this alone will not be sufficient to check and reverse the decline of the dormouse.

4.2 Current Factors Affecting The Species

- **Lack of coppice management**
- **Lack of thinning in regenerating woodland**
- **Destruction of woodland habitat**
- **Habitat fragmentation**
- **Loss of species rich, infrequently cut hedgerows**
- **Isolation of sites**

5. CURRENT LOCAL ACTION

- Warwickshire Wildlife Trust has recently (2004) secured a grant for a year's project for the Princethorpe woodlands. The project is specifically addressing the issue of enhancing connectivity between the woods both physically and in terms of access and has obvious potential to enhance the area for dormice.
- Much of the active conservation work in the sub-region has taken place directly from the work by Natural England in 1999-2001 and comprises actions associated with 5 year management plans for dormice in the 5 'newly discovered' woodlands which contain dormice. Conservation work has focussed on nest boxes and appropriate management, in particular coppice management.
- The Warwickshire Mammal Group has taken a lead in surveying woodlands not surveyed for dormice between 1999 and 2001, and re-surveying woods where their presence may have been missed, for example, Ryton Wood.
- Landowners such as Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and the Forestry Commission are undertaking work on some of the areas under their control, including reinstatement of coppice that will directly benefit dormice e.g. the WWT reserve at Hampton Wood. Weston Wood has a management plan in place, including provision for dormice, commissioned by the Forestry Commission.

6. PROPOSED LOCAL ACTIONS (some dates amended - Core Steering Group - Feb 2008)

ACTION	Lead	Partners	By	Meets objective
Policy & Legislation				
PL1. Ensure that all relevant policy is included in Local Planning Documents (see ODPM Planning Policy Statement PPS9) to ensure that new development does not have an adverse effect on dormice and their habitat.	LBAPSG	NE WM WWT RBC WDC SDC	2004-2015	A
PL2. Actively encourage the inclusion in local strategic documents of policies that safeguard and promote dormice and their habitats.	RBC	NE WDC FE SDC WM WWT	2004-2015	A,B
PL3. Ensure that any site meeting the relevant criteria, but not already an SSSI, is considered for designation as an SINC.	WSP	NE RBC SDC WDC	2006	A, E
PL4. Enforce hedgerow protection and encourage planting of hedgerows and other habitat linkages.	RBC	NE LOs SDC WDC	2004-2015	A,B
Site / Species Safeguard & Management				
SM1. Actively promote consideration of the habitat requirements of dormice in management plans for all potentially suitable woodlands.	FE	WWT LOs NE	2004-2015	A,B
SM2. Develop WGS agreements for all sites on which dormice have been identified.	FE	RBC SDC WDC NE LOs	2004-2015	B,D
SM3. Produce a plan for the woodlands in the Princethorpe woodlands cluster.	WWT	LOs FE	2005	C
SM4. Promote habitat linkages through hedgerow planting and protection.	FWAG	WWT NE WDC RBC SDC	2004-2015	A,B,C
Advisory				
A1. Provide advice to key groups including landowners and managers with regard to best practice management for dormice.	WDG	WWT NE	2004-2015	A,B

Research & Monitoring				
RM1. Monitor all existing known dormice populations.	WDG	NE LOs FE WWT FoBW	2010	D
RM2. Carry out accurate survey of potentially suitable woodlands not covered in previous surveys 1999-2000.	WDG	FC WWT	2004- 2015	E
RM3. Review policy on reintroductions and releases.	WDG	WM NE WWT	2006	A
Communication, Education & Publicity				
CP1. Using local media, raise the profile of Dormice and improve understanding of the issues affecting the species.	WWT	FE FoBW, FWAG LO LBAPSG RBC SDC WDC WGS WM WDG WSP	2004- 2015	A, B

Abbreviations: NE – Natural England, FC – Forestry Commission, FE – Forest Enterprise, FoBW – Friends of Brandon Wood, FWAG – Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, LBAPSG – Local Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group, LO – Landowner, RBC – Rugby Borough Council, SDC – Stratford District Council, WDC – Warwick District Council, WGS – Woodland Grant Scheme, WM – Warwickshire Museum, WDG – Warwickshire Dormouse Group, WSP – Wildlife Sites Project, WWT – Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

7. REFERENCES (see also **LBAP Bibliography** web page)

Bodnar, S. (2000) *Survey of dormice in Warwickshire*, English Nature

8. FURTHER INFORMATION (see separate **Links** web page for links to web sites)

UK Biodiversity Action Plan no.462

Bright, P., Morris, P., & Mitchell-Jones, T. (2006) *The dormouse conservation handbook*. Natural England.

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9. CONTACT