

Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*)

The dormouse is a strictly nocturnal rodent, found in deciduous woodlands and hedges. It feeds on fruit, nuts, insects, flowers and pollen. During the day it sleeps in a ball-like nest, often in a hollow tree branch or deserted bird nest, and is active at night. During the summer, the dormouse will rarely come down, but in winter it tends to hibernate on the ground, often under a layer of moss.

UKBAP priority habitats of particular importance to this species are: ancient and/ or species-rich hedgerows, lowland beech wood, wet woodlands, and broadleaved and yew woodland.

Current status

National status

The dormouse is listed on Appendix 3 of the Bonn Convention and Annex IVa of the EC Habitats Directive. It is protected under Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations (1994) and Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981, as amended). It is also listed as a Priority Species on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. Whilst the dormouse is relatively widely dispersed in the southern counties, from Devon to Kent, the species appears to have been lost from seven counties in the last hundred years, representing half its former range. The species is virtually absent from the north, with the exception of small populations in Cumbria and Northumberland. Even where widespread, dormouse populations are patchily located.

Status on the network

Dormice are present in Highways Agency network areas 1-9 (inclusive), 19 and 20. There are only two references to dormice in the Highways Agency network ecological information, on the A30 and M2. However, it is likely that the species is significantly under-recorded and wooded road verges can harbour significant populations of dormice, particularly those with a diverse mixture of flowering and fruiting shrubs, providing a food source throughout the dormouse's active season (April – October), and those with good connections to other suitable habitats.

Current factors affecting the species

Woodland management practices, particularly clear-felling or the cessation of management by coppicing

Routine management of the Highways Agency soft estate can be detrimental to dormice, where present, unless it takes into account their requirements for species diversity, habitat structure and connectivity or their seasonal nature.

Fragmentation of woodland leaving isolated, non-viable populations

New roads, or road improvements, may cause isolation or fragmentation if hedges or woodlands occupied by dormice are severed.

Current action

Dormouse surveys are carried out as part of the Environmental Assessment process for any proposed new scheme, and thus avoidance or mitigation can be proposed at the earliest possible stage.

The Nature Conservation Advice Note (DMRB Volume 10) provides some advice on dormice and an Advice Note on Dormice is due to be published in the near future.

Management advice for dormice is provided in the English Nature Dormouse Conservation Handbook.



Objectives

The aim of the Highways Agency Species Action Plan for the dormouse is to enhance the value of the soft estate for dormice, avoid adverse

impacts associated with unsympathetic management and to fully mitigate any potential effects of new schemes on the species.

	Objective	Proposed actions
A	To avoid impacts of new road schemes or improvements on dormice.	6
B	To mitigate unavoidable impacts on dormice and/or their habitat.	7
C	To raise the awareness of HA staff, Managing Agents and consultants regarding the significance of dormice on the network.	1, 2, 9
D	To develop a greater knowledge of the distribution of dormice in the soft estate.	3
E	To safeguard and enhance known dormouse populations in the soft estate.	4, 5, 8
F	To safeguard and enhance potentially suitable dormouse habitat in network areas 1-9, 19 and 20.	2

Proposed action

The following table lists the actions required to achieve the objectives set out in this Plan. For some of the actions, potential partners have

been assigned as likely sources of co-operation. Targets are provided to give an indication of the timescale for the proposed action.

	Action	Potential partners	Target
	<i>Policy, guidance and advice</i>		
1	Publish an Advice Note on dormice in the DMRB.	-	2003
2	Provide detailed information in TRMM on the management of highway vegetation for the benefit of dormice.	-	2003
	<i>Surveying</i>		
3	Identify all areas on the network likely to be used by dormice. Include all records on the Environmental Database. Carry out in conjunction with the Great Nut Hunt, organised by the Mammal Trust, English Nature and the Center Parcs.	Mammal Society	2007

	Action (continued)	Potential partners	Target
	<i>Research and monitoring</i>		
4	Monitor all sites where dormouse translocation schemes have been carried out, associated with road building or improvement schemes, by annual nest box surveys for five years' post-translocation.	-	As schemes arise
5	Select 10 sites on the soft estate where dormice have been recorded and monitor population in accordance with the National Dormouse Monitoring protocol.	Mammal Society	2004
	<i>Mitigation and Management</i>		
6	For all new schemes and road improvements, include search for records of dormice in desk study at stage 1 and in surveys at stage 2. (Early identification of this constraint may allow impacts to be avoided).	-	Ongoing
7	Where impacts of new schemes and road improvements on dormouse habitat are unavoidable, consider the options for habitat recreation and enhancement, and consider mitigation of fragmentation by maintaining "green links" across roads. Undertake 15 new planting schemes to extend the potential of known dormouse habitat.	-	2012
8	Ensure that best practice is employed in the management of verges where dormice are known to be present. In particular by management of species composition, physical woodland structure and timing of operations.	-	Ongoing
	<i>Communications and publicity</i>		
9	Information on dormice should be included in environmental training for HA staff and Managing Agents.		Ongoing

Links with other plans

This plan should be read in conjunction with the HAPs for woodland and scrub and for boundary features.

The dormouse is listed as a Priority Species in the following LBAPs: Cheshire, Shropshire, Leicester & Rutland, Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, Essex, Kent, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Hertfordshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Taunton Dean and Devon. None ascribe specific actions to the Highways Agency.

Dormouse is a Regional Biodiversity indicator for English Nature's South-east and West Midlands regions.

Lead partners

The lead partners in the UKBAP for the dormouse are The Wildlife Trusts and English Nature.

