The State of Britain's Dormice 2026

people's trust for endangered species

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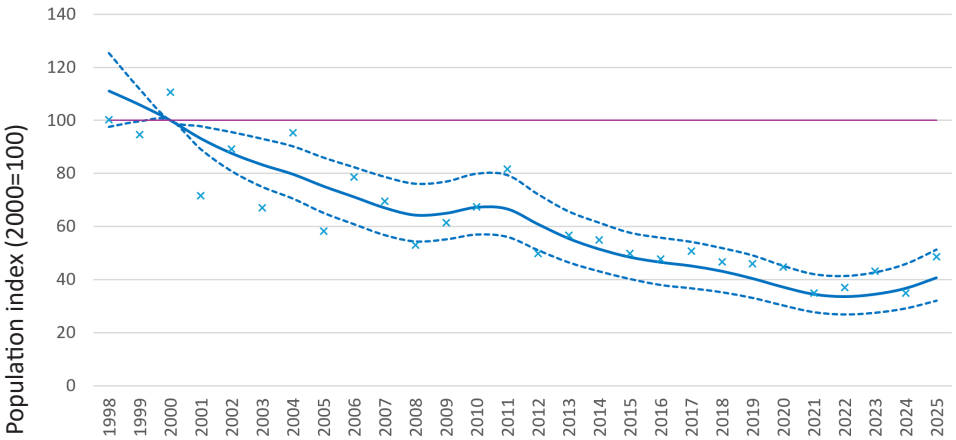
- Hazel dormice have undergone a long decline in Britain over much of the last century. In the last 25 years, since 2000, the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme (NDMP) shows a population decline of 59.4%, equivalent to an average rate of decline of 3.5% each year.
- In recent years, however, the decline shows a reversal, with the population increasing by almost ten per cent between 2020 and 2025.
- The improving fortunes of the dormouse population coincide with a period of drier and hotter than average springs and summers; further investigation is needed to understand the reasons for the recovery and whether it could be sustained.

Hazel dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) are a woodland species living in woodland edge, shrub and scrub habitats that have a mix of new growth and established trees. Four-fifths of the dormouse population in Britain is estimated to be in deciduous woodlands. Traditionally, hazel dormice have been associated with coppiced woodland but, more recently, it's been demonstrated that areas of connected, successional scrub are also highly suitable. Hazel dormice are also found in other wooded and scrub habitats, including hedgerows, and on roadside and railway verges, and coniferous plantations. The importance of these habitats is likely to be increasingly recognised in conservation as we better understand the value of well-connected environments, providing large areas of mixed, structurally diverse habitats.

Monitoring dormice, by recording counts of individuals in nest boxes through the year, began in 1988 at just five sites set up by Paul Bright and Pat Morris, at Royal Holloway,



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The population index estimated at NDMP sites between 1998 and 2025
The smoothed trend, shown by the solid line, gives an indication of the underlying change compared with the population in 2000, nominally given a value of 100. From 2000 to 2025, the index has declined by between a half and two-thirds (59.4%). Dashed lines indicate the statistical confidence in the estimate (95% confidence limits) and annual estimates (crosses) show the year-to-year variation around the smoothed trend.

	2000–2025	2015–2025	2020–2025
Overall change	-59.4%	-16.1%	+9.4%
Confidence limits	-70% to -52.4%	-30.6% to +3.9%	-4.1% to +25.9%
Average annual change	-3.54%	-1.74%	+1.81%

The 25-, ten- and five-year change in the smoothed population index
The rate of population decline has slowed, from an average of 3.54% per year over the period since 2000, to 1.74% per year in the last ten years and, since 2020, the population has grown by an average 1.81% per year.

What does the population index measure?

The population index is a relative measure of dormouse abundance in woodlands from year to year. It estimates whether the population is larger or smaller than a baseline value. It doesn't say how big the population is, only how it's changing over time. The index is based on a sample (NDMP sites) of all of those where dormice are present and, as with any sample, there is a measure of uncertainty about how close it is to the value if the whole of the population could be assessed.

The index is estimated using counts of dormice (excluding litters) between May and October at sites with at least 20 nest boxes, surveyed for five or more years. The number of sites each year has varied from fewer than 100, prior to 2001, to between 250 and 350 sites each year since 2011. About 500 sites have contributed data in total.

Although the NDMP ran through the 1990s, the number of sites at this time was comparatively small and the way in which counts were recorded changed as the scheme developed. Taking a later year, such as 2000, as the baseline, gives a more reliable estimate to measure change against.

University of London. It has continued as the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme (NDMP), with funding from Natural England and PTES. Since the programme's beginnings, dormice have been recorded by volunteers at 775 sites across England and Wales, submitting over 137,000 records.

Current conservation status and population trend

Hazel dormice are recognised as 'Vulnerable' to extinction in Britain in the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species. Since the end of the 19th century, hazel dormice are thought to have become extinct in 20 English counties and have been reintroduced back into six of these. In Wales, they retain much of their historic range, but the size of the population, like elsewhere, is thought to be decreasing. The NDMP measures changes in dormouse abundance at predominantly woodland sites, recording counts of dormice in nest boxes, put up for the purpose of monitoring. It estimates an 'index', or relative population size, each year from counts at sites in England and Wales between May and October. The long-term trend in the population index is shown to the left.

The population index is a measure of the average (pre- and post-breeding) population each year. The smoothed trend evens out annual fluctuations to show the underlying change. At the time of the last State of Britain's Dormice report, in 2023, the smoothed

trend had fallen by 70% between 2000 and 2022. Since then, it has increased and the population size in 2025 is now considered to be 59.4% smaller than it was in 2000.

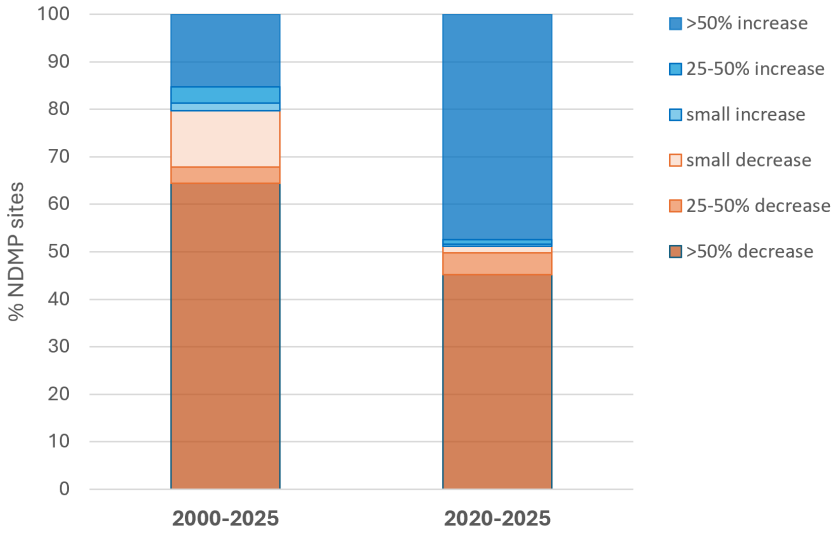
If the proportion of sites that were monitored in at least 23 years since 2000 (59 sites) and those that were monitored in at least four years since 2020 (219 sites) are compared, a smaller proportion in the more recent period show significant declines (shown in orange in the chart opppsite). Around two-thirds of sites (64%) in the longer period declined by the equivalent of more than 50% in 25 years, designated as a Red Alert. The figure in 2020–2025 was 45% and a similar proportion of sites (48%) showed an equivalent increase (blue).

Plotted on a map, the distribution of sites that show increases and those that show declines are interspersed—that is, there aren't areas that show predominantly one or the other.

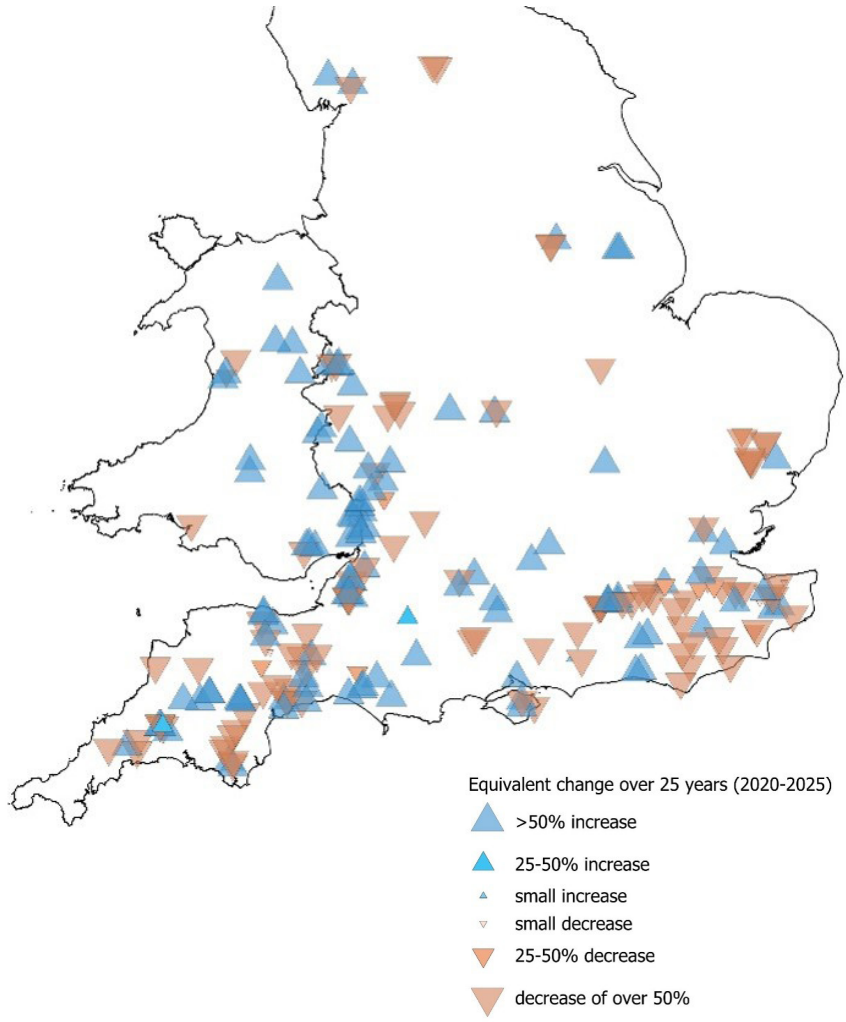
Possible reasons for populations doing better

Fluctuations in the dormouse population could be due to various factors. Environmental change is likely to play a predominant role, and one marked change in the last five years has been the patterns in the weather.

The six-month period from March to August (meteorological spring and summer) was warmer and drier in 2020–2025 in Central England than it was in 2015–2020. While there was a summer heatwave in 2018, several springs and summers in the five years to 2020 were closer to



Percentage of sites over 25- and five-year periods showing decreases or increases in the estimated population index
A decrease equivalent to more than 50% in 25 years is equivalent to a Red Alert decline. A decline of 25% would be an Amber Alert.



The distribution of NDMP sites monitored in four or more years since 2020, showing the population change as either an increase or decrease
Most sites (203 of the 219) show the largest rate of change (equivalent to more than 50% over 25 years). Declines of this size are reported as Red Alert declines for some birds. Sixteen sites show smaller rates of decline or increase.

long-term averages. In contrast, 2020–2025 was characterised by persistent high-pressure over Central England, with less rainfall and higher temperatures. Spring and summer 2025 combined saw a mean maximum temperature anomaly of +2.1 °C and less than 40% of average rainfall in the driest regions, making it the warmest and driest spring England had in over 100 years.

Recent research has shown that dormice are found in torpor (short periods when they slow their metabolic rate to save energy) more often on colder and wetter days, and that at NDMP sites where torpor was more frequent, fewer adult dormice and fewer litters were recorded. The hotter weather earlier in the year is likely to have provided an increased abundance of food such as flowers and fruits, and more foraging opportunities which could have positively impacted breeding.

The extreme weather has continued this year, with the warmest ever spring. It's possible that the changing climate will result in some weather impacts that favour dormice and enable them to breed more successfully. Especially if our conservation efforts, providing diverse woodland habitats, result in an increase in forage and nesting opportunities to support greater numbers of animals. How resilient the population is to other extreme weather events, however, remains unknown. Prolonged periods of drought could disrupt feeding opportunities just before the critical hibernation period whilst mild or very wet winters might also have impacts that could threaten populations.

The data show a positive upturn in the relative abundance in recent years, which is to be celebrated. But it remains critical that monitoring continues, especially in different types of habitat, and that the consequences of a continually changing climate, and how habitat management can mitigate the impacts, are better understood.



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