

Press Release

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Rare dormice find a home in Nottinghamshire

Wildlife charity reintroduces extinct dormice as part of national programme

Following the successful reintroduction of rare hazel dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) to an undisclosed woodland location in Nottinghamshire last year, the charity People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) will today (10 June 2014) release 21 breeding pairs into another nearby wood, as part of a national programme to help this endangered species survive.

Despite their once widespread existence throughout much of England and Wales, the range and population of the dormouse has diminished significantly over the past 100 years, and the species is now rare and vulnerable to extinction. However, analysis from the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme (NDMP) - the world's largest and longest running small mammal monitoring project which is managed by PTES and co-funded by Natural England - suggests that although dormice continue to decline, the rate of decline may be slowing.

This does not mean that dormice are 'out of the woods yet' though, and such reintroductions play an important role in UK dormouse conservation. Following a recent review of dormouse reintroductions by Natural England, PTES has carefully selected an appropriate release site this year, clustering it closely with last year's location. Habitat such as woodland and hedgerows will be improved between the two sites so that as the two separate populations establish themselves in their respective woodlands, they will later have the opportunity to disperse and eventually join up. This will enhance the chance of long term viability for dormice in Nottinghamshire.

Ian White, Dormouse Officer at PTES, explains why dormouse reintroductions are part of the charity's long-term conservation strategy for the species: "We

cannot undo overnight the changes that have occurred in our countryside and rural practices over the last 100 years which have contributed to the decline of dormice. But with time and careful management we can create sustainable areas of woodland and hedgerows so that dormice can re-establish themselves and thrive."

This year marks the 24th dormouse reintroduction by PTES at 19 different sites, with more than 750 dormice released across 12 English counties over the last 21 years. In this latest reintroduction, 43 captive-bred dormice will be released into the wild at a woodland in Nottinghamshire.

The Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust actively manages the woodland where the dormice are being released, ensuring the habitat offers suitable food and shelter for the released animals as well as wider range of wildlife, including birds, bats and insects.

To get live updates from the reintroduction throughout the day, follow PTES on Facebook or Twitter (@PTES and #dormouseday).

- Ends -

For more information, images, interviews or to attend the reintroduction on June 10th, please call Jane Bevan or Susannah Penn at Firebird PR on 01235 835297 / 07977 459 547

NOTES FOR EDITORS

About the reintroduction

The 20 pairs of dormice to be released in Nottinghamshire have been captive bred through the Common Dormouse Captive Breeders Group. Prior to release, they undergo thorough checks with vets at the Zoological Society of London and Paignton Zoo in Devon to make sure they are healthy and have the best chance of survival. The dormice are then released on-site in breeding pairs in their own secure wooden nest box fitted inside a mesh cage secured to woodland trees. This helps them adjust to their new home in the wild. Once the initial relocation has taken place, the dormice are checked and fed daily in these cages over a two week period to help acclimatise them to their new environment. A small door in each cage is then opened so that the dormice are free to explore their new home whilst having the security of the mesh cage and food if needed. These are eventually removed once the animals have settled into the wood.

About the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme (NDMP)

The NDMP is co-funded by People's Trust for Endangered Species and Natural England and has been running for 24 years. It is one of only a handful of mammal programmes contributing long-term data on population trends.

The NDMP relies completely on the enthusiastic commitment of volunteers who collect dormouse data annually at over 300 monitoring sites all over the country. Dormice population numbers and density in their remaining range are monitored by putting up nest boxes similar to bird boxes on hazel trees and checking the boxes for occupancy at regular intervals. The results are held in a database which is used to assess the status of the species over time.

About PTES

PTES is a UK conservation charity created in 1977 to ensure a future for endangered species throughout the world. Working to protect some of our most threatened wildlife species and habitats, it provides practical conservation support through funding research and internships; providing grant-aid for world-wide and native mammals species conservation; supporting education, training and outreach programmes; and driving public participation via wildlife monitoring surveys, publications, campaigns and events. Priority species and habitats include the hazel dormouse, hedgehogs, beavers, noble chafer and stag beetles and traditional orchards and native woodlands.

Visit www.ptes.org for more information about PTES or follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

About Natural England

Natural England works with the People's Trust for Endangered Species to provide an ongoing programme of funding, coordination and monitoring of the dormouse recovery project. Natural England works for people, places and nature to conserve and enhance biodiversity, landscapes and wildlife in rural, urban, coastal and marine areas. They conserve and enhance the natural environment for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people, and the economic prosperity it brings. www.naturalengland.org.uk