

Title: Nest material preferences in the common dormouse, *Muscardinus avellanarius* (L.), in the southern United Kingdom. *MSc thesis, Staffordshire University, 2009*

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Background to study

Dormice build nests throughout the year for breeding, summer refuge and hibernation and as such play an important role in dormouse reproduction and survival. Traditionally honeysuckle bark has been considered an important component of dormouse nests; however dormice occur in a variety of habitat types of which many do not contain honeysuckle. Knowledge about nest material preference and associated costs to individuals is important when considering management and creation of dormouse habitat.

Method

- Six National Dormouse Monitoring Scheme woodlands were sampled in February and March for dormouse nests. All sites were ancient semi-natural lowland woodlands which varied in their canopy and understory species composition and structure.
- Dormouse nests were collected from nest boxes and tubes if present and any nests that had been added to by other species were discarded.
- Nests were removed from site, deconstructed into different components and the dry weight recorded as a relative measure of each component.
- The distance from the sampled nest box to nearest component specimen in the field was taken and standardised using horizontal distance from box to stem.

Key results

- 18 identifiable materials were found in 56 nests collected across the study sites and only 1 did not contain either honeysuckle or clematis.
- Honeysuckle was the most frequently used component (84% of nests) and most commonly the largest nest component (36% nests).
- Hazel was the second most frequently used component (68% of nests)
- 27% of nests did not include material from the tree on which the nest box was located despite the species being utilised as nest materials within the study.
- The proportion and dry weight of nest components reduced when distance to source plant increased.
- Dormice travelled 30-50 m to collect honeysuckle which was further than for other nest components (next furthest distance for oak = 19.8 m).

Key messages to landowners and managers derived from these results

- Dormice do have a preference for honeysuckle when present and they will travel further to obtain it than for other species. It is therefore important to maintain species composition of woodlands where honeysuckle is present and promote connectivity of canopy and/or understory to maintain its accessibility.

Key words/phrases

Dormice; *Muscardinus avellanarius*; nest material; UK; honeysuckle; hazel; nest boxes; National Dormouse Monitoring Scheme