

Title: Guidance on managing woodlands with dormice in England, *Interim Guidance v.2, 2007*

Author: Forestry Commission, UK and Natural England

Country: UK

Background to study

Dormice are a European Protected Species and as such their conservation within woodlands is governed by the Habitats Regulations in UK law whereby it is an offence to cause damage, disturbance or harm to protected species. Complying with the Habitats Regulations however is inherently difficult in woodlands which are often managed to help conserve dormice but where management may contravene the strict protection required by the Directive. Guidance is provided on managing woodlands to minimise the risk of committing an offence.

Method

- The production of guidance document on managing woodlands for dormice including assessing dormouse presence, suitable habitat, the potential risk of activities and operations, advice on good practice of operations, information on licensing and additional conservation tools.

Key messages to landowners and managers

- The presence of dormice in woodland should be established. Check for local records using the National Biodiversity Network (NBN), conduct field surveys such as natural nest searches in shrub layer from spring to autumn, gnawed hazel nut searches in autumn or erect nest tubes. In all instances assume low density, seek guidance from the Dormouse Conservation Handbook (2006) and/or engage with local specialist groups to conduct surveys or give advice. If habitat is suitable and dormice records exist nearby, assume presence.
- Suitable dormouse habitat consists of species rich deciduous woodland with good understorey and mix of fruiting species; coppice woodlands; mixed conifer plantations, especially on ancient woodland sites; shrubby margins along rides, within glades; thick hedgerows connected to woodlands; thicket stage (5-15 yr) clearfells in mixed woodland.
- Woodland management should employ small scale operations and create a mosaic of suitable contiguous habitats, leaving undisturbed areas for populations to recolonise during operations.
- Harvesting in favourable habitats should be conducted in autumn and avoided between June and mid-August when dormice are breeding. Where possible extract timber using a forwarder rather than a skidder to reduce the risk of damaging nest on or near the ground
- Avoid felling $> \frac{1}{3}$ rd of a wood, less for small woods and retain remaining habitat for >5 years. Scarify ground the same year to avoid disturbance of shrubby habitat suitable for dormice. Felling removes suitable habitat and as such has a greater impact on dormice than thinning.
- Thinning should be restricted to $< \frac{2}{3}$ rd of suitable habitat in one year, leaving the remaining undisturbed for several years to retain connectivity and food resources for dormice.
- Coppicing should be undertaken from November to March when dormice are hibernating, coppicing a maximum of 25% of area in any one year. Be aware of hibernating dormice on the ground and avoid unnecessary disturbance.
- Mowing should only be done on existing short vegetation and scrub cutting, if essential, should be done in rotational patches. Any track construction or ground works should avoid the highest quality habitat and be carried out outside of June-mid August.
- Any operations at high risk of damaging or destroying dormice or their habitat, in that they do not meet the recommended guidelines, are to remove entire woodlands or involve intensive recreational activities will require a protected species license. This will only be issued if the overall package will not be detrimental to the population of dormice.

- Improving shrub and canopy connectivity within and between woodlands, creating woodland networks, enhancing shrub layer by coppicing or thinning canopy, excluding livestock and favouring broadleaves when thinning conifers will all help to improve woodlands and landscapes for dormice.

Key words/phrases

Dormice; *Muscardinus avellanarius*; protected species; Habitats Regulation; woodland management; clear fell; harvesting; coppicing; thinning; timber extraction;