

Title: Distribution, abundance and conservation status of dormice (*Myoxidae*) in Lithuania. *Hystrix*, 1994

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Background to study

Four species of dormice occur in Lithuania, yet information regarding their distribution, abundance and conservation status within the country is incomplete due to a lack of empirical research. New records have been published and as such a review of their status in Lithuania is presented here.

Method

- Data on the locality of four dormouse species in Lithuania were obtained from scientific and popular publications, museum collections, oral records in particular from ornithologists studying hole-nesting birds, national magazine/newspaper publications.
- Nest boxes placed across Lithuania were also checked to establish dormouse presence.
- Dormouse localities were mapped at a 10 x 10 km² resolution and where two or more records were obtained from the same grid square, the grid was classed as having one sign.

Key results

- Edible dormice (*M. glis* L) occupy mature oak with hazel and deciduous river valley forests in Lithuania where they are at the northern edge of their distribution. Since 1990 when two localities (Kaunas and Alytus districts) were known, 6 further occupied sites have been identified between Vilnius and Kaunas. These probably represent remnant populations. Edible dormice are listed as rare in the Red Data List of Lithuania and five populations occur in protected areas.
- Forest dormice (*D. nitedula* Pall.) occupy Scotch pine, birch, Norway spruce and buckthorn mixed forest in Lithuania where they are at the northern edge of their distributional range. Current distribution is unclear, but they historically occurred in Jonava and from 1985 to 1993 were found in SW district of Sakiai. Species is listed as rare in the Red Data List of Lithuania.
- Garden dormice (*E. quercinus* L.) historically occurred in the southern Varena district, occupying dry Scotch pine forest with juniper and moss/lichen ground cover. Current distribution is unclear and despite ecological flexibility, their distribution is sporadic. Recent unexplained declines elsewhere and its listing as 'insufficient knowledge' in the Red Data List of Lithuania highlight the need to further study the requirements and distribution of this species.
- Common dormice (*M. avellanarius* L.) are the most widespread in Lithuania, occurring in >80 localities across 32 of 44 administrative districts. Distribution is concentrated in central and northern regions where it occurs in mixed/ deciduous forests mostly with hazel understorey. Also occurs in western spruce forests whilst it is relatively unrecorded in eastern and southern areas due to the dominance of pine forest. Densities of common dormice are comparatively low with spring and autumn densities averaging at 0.4-1.5 ind/ha and 3 ind/ha respectively.

Key messages to landowners and managers derived from these results

- Mixed and deciduous forests in Lithuania should be conserved and forest management should encourage the establishment of dense understorey by thinning canopy cover as required.
- Preserve mature oak and mixed forests to maintain extant fat and forest dormouse populations.
- Further studies investigating dormice distribution, notably garden dormice is required to determine their status within the country.

Key words/phrases

Dormice; distribution; habitats; abundance; conservation status; Lithuania