

Title: Hampshire dormouse survey, *Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust Report, 2004*

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Background to study

A comprehensive account of the distribution and status of dormice in Hampshire was produced in 2003 and revealed that dormice occupancy was nearing 70% of woodland sites within the county. Habitat management has been highlighted to be the most important factor in maintaining extant populations in Hampshire and continued monitoring following suggestions from 2003 is recommended.

Method

- Dormouse presence was established using a public participation hazel nut hunt of sites selected by participants or of prescribed sites where the most recent records for dormice were >10 years old or where sites were identified as suitable but had no previous records.
- Survey forms and leaflets were distributed throughout the county and were returned with specimen nuts to Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust for verification and analysis.

Key results

- 10% of 2000 survey forms were returned and 47 sites were surveyed. 27 volunteers participated in the survey which was an increase from surveys in 2003.
- Dormouse presence was confirmed at 23 of the 47 sites visited and nearly half of these sites had a single nut shell confirming presence, inferring low population density.
- The nut hunt surveys alongside records sent to the County Mammal Recorder and other surveys show an increase of 10% in the recorded knowledge of dormouse distribution in Hampshire.
- Dormice are widespread but patchily distributed across the county and dormouse records were obtained from both broadleaved and mixed woodland types.
- The majority of occupied sites were designated as either Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SINC) or Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- New records were obtained for sites adjacent to occupied sites suggesting networks of linked populations and the majority of sites where records had by >10 yrs old were inhabited by dormice suggesting population persistence.
- The majority of occupied sites contained Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats such as Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland and only two occupied sites that contained BAP habitats were not designated for their nature conservation interest.

Key messages to landowners and managers derived from these results

- Hedgerows may be effective in increasing dormouse distribution, and maintaining connectivity between woodland patches is important to establish local networks of populations.
- Conservation advice on sympathetic management should be sought for occupied sites or those adjacent to known populations which are not designated for their conservation interest.
- Nut hunts are useful for determining presence, but survey effort should be no less than 5 quadrats per wood and woods should be surveyed for more than one year.
- Ancient semi-natural woodlands are suitable for dormice and surveys to assess dormouse activity should be carried out. Mixed woodlands may also be potential dormouse habitat.

Key words/phrases

Dormice; *Muscardinus avellanarius*; England; nut hunt; public participation surveys; distribution; designated sites; Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitats.