

The Dormouse Monitor

Newsletter of the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme

Welcome to the autumn edition of *The Dormouse Monitor*. Thanks to all of you who sent in bodies of dead dormice to Ghislaine at Paignton Zoo and faecal samples to Jessica at London Zoo. We hope to bring you news of their findings as soon as we can.

Now is the time to send in all the results of your box checking this year, if you haven't already done so. The sooner we get them, the sooner we can get them onto the database, giving Paul and Fiona plenty of time to analyse them. We then have a better chance of reporting back to you in the spring edition with a summary of the overall picture for the year.

The number of people on the mailing list to




receive *The Dormouse Monitor* is rising all the time. We always have a few extra copies, so call Susan on 020 7498 4533 or email susan@ptes.org, if someone you know would like to receive one. We would especially like the landowners of the property you work on to get one, too. If you know that they are not on the list and you think they might like to be, give us a call. Would you like more than one copy, so that you can distribute them among your group of volunteers?

Have you any news you would like to share with other monitors? If so, do let us know and we'll print it in the next edition. It's your newsletter, so please keep in touch.




2002 Records Reminder

All through the dormouse's active period we hope you have been out in the field doggedly checking thousands upon thousands of dormouse nestboxes collecting data for the national database. Now, it's over to us to enter all that valuable information onto the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme database. 

So please send all your records, whether you found dormice or not, as soon as you can to:

Susan Sharafi
PTES
15 Cloisters House
8 Battersea Park Road
London SW8 4BG 

Every piece of data you collect is vital; it continues to help us to understand the changing status of dormice in Britain. We can then all make sure that we are doing all we can to help the dormice themselves. 



2002 Dormouse Releases

As part of the ongoing reintroduction programme, dormice were released into two woodlands this summer. The first release took place at a very picturesque site in the Peak District, owned by the National Trust. This woodland, although ideal for dormice, is on a steep hillside in a rather inaccessible spot, so isn't ideal for the volunteers whose job it was to regularly feed the animals. We are extremely grateful to them for their perseverance at what seemed, at times, a truly impossible task.

The other site was in Lincolnshire, a county not known for its steep hillsides, for which the volunteers were very grateful. A full report on this release appears below.

Finding sites in future

Every year, it's difficult to find suitable sites for reintroductions, which means that sometimes all the work on the ground, including recruiting the team of volunteers and getting the necessary permissions from landowners, has to be done in a very short space of time at the last minute. Paul Bright has always been very keen to look much further ahead and actually chose reintroduction sites, perhaps up to ten years, in advance. Not only does this make all the planning easier, but it also means that, if necessary, there's time to modify site management plans to make sure they meet all the necessary criteria as closely as possible.

In order to do this, English Nature is funding several months work based at Royal Holloway, University of London, this autumn. By next spring we should have a very good idea, quite literally, of where we are going next.



Lincolnshire Reintroduction

This July saw the reintroduction of dormice to Lincolnshire, and, as a welcome distraction from my MSc at Royal Holloway studying our other species of dormouse, the edible dormouse, I was called upon to take action on the day.

The day began in the early hours as the 32 dormice were paired and packed in 16 nestboxes by Julian at Paignton Zoo before being driven to a meeting point near the M25. It was here that, much to the

confusion of passing motorists, they were transferred to my trusty car, for the long journey to Lincolnshire. Despite being unsure of the journey time, and a lorry load of spilt glue closing the A1, we all arrived safely and only a little late. The location of the site wasn't as secret as I had been expecting, however, as we were greeted by about 40 people in the car park, all looking very expectant! The reintroduction of dormice into Lincolnshire had clearly attracted some interest. There were two TV crews, local radio and newspaper reporters, as well as the volunteers who would be looking after the dormice during and after the release. Susan and Clare from PTES, who had coordinated the release, were there, too, to field the media questions along with representatives from the local Wildlife Trust, Forest Enterprise and Jim Alexander whose previous reintroduction experience later proved invaluable.

Once I had opened the door of the car I had my first experience of dealing with the eager press as they all naturally clamoured for the best shots and interviews. Once in the wood, they got their chance and, as I was being interviewed for local radio, the TV crews filmed nestboxes being carried along the path. The first



Release day dawns for the dormice being reintroduced to the Lincolnshire site. Malcolm sets up the cages (below) in preparation for their new residents, with the help of a team of local volunteers. The dormice (left) spent 10 days in the cages acclimatising to their new woodland home.



News from Monitors

Dormice in Cumbria

Mark Rawlins who monitors the boxes at Roudsea Wood, NNR in Cumbria received a surprising letter accompanied by a photograph from a local lady. She and a number of others were searching for a lost kitten at the bottom of an embankment belonging to a working steam railway (a popular local tourist attraction) when out popped a dormouse from the top of a raspberry bush!

Mark also reports that earlier this year, various groups including the Cumbria Wildlife Trust, the National Trust, the Forestry Commission, English Nature and several dormouse enthusiasts got together to set up the Cumbria Dormouse Action Group. They have already held one meeting and at the beginning of September they organised a dormouse training day.

News from Gordon Vaughan, Okehampton, Devon

Gordon has incidentally been recording dormice in Devon for even longer than Doug Woods, who was the first mammal worker to put up nesting boxes and was the inspiration for the whole monitoring scheme. Gordon's boxes were put up as bird boxes and almost at once he found that dormice displaced the birds "denying the birds the chance to nest successfully", which wasn't what Gordon was hoping for.

In July, Gordon wrote giving us the latest news of

pair of dormice was then taken to the first release cage. A local news crew were at the front of the queue and they got the shots they wanted for that evening's news. When they had finished, a friendly 'Heart of the Country' film crew took over and followed the story.

The next few hours were spent delivering the pairs of dormice to their pre-release cages throughout the wood. I was impressed by the quality of the woodland, which forms a large woodland oasis in an area dominated by large fields of agricultural monocultures. Thankfully, hedgerows still connect this wood with other suitable hedgerow and woodland habitat, hopefully allowing this reinstated population to expand in the future. Food and water were put in each cage before being securely closed. By six o'clock all 16 pairs were safely in their new, temporary, homes. These pairs of dormice then

the dormice on the northern slopes of Dartmoor. Spring was unsettled with a lot of cold and often damp weather. As a result, dormouse occupation of boxes was slightly down on previous years with 28 bird and four dormouse boxes used up till the end of June.

He found something quite exceptional; 10 litters of young dormice during the last part of June, their ages ranging from between four or five weeks old to some recently born. Eight of the litters were in bird boxes, the other two in the dormouse boxes provided lower down than the bird boxes themselves. Of the former, two were in bird boxes that had originally contained part-built pied flycatcher nests before they were taken over by dormice. Gordon tells us that altogether dormice caused the failure of 10 birds nests.



spent about 10 days in these pre-release cages, being looked after by the local volunteers, before an exit hole was made in each box allowing them to explore their new woodland. The volunteers continued to provide food in the cages until the dormice had found their own natural supply in the wood. Then, hopefully, the dormice had a chance to breed before hibernating.

If all goes well, next spring should see the emergence of about 50–60 dormice (taking into account winter mortality), which should form the basis of a viable future population. Many thanks to Jim Alexander and all the volunteers who looked after the dormice and who will be undertaking all the monitoring to measure the success of this reintroduction in future.

Malcolm Burgess, Royal Holloway, University of London



Dormouse Distribution in Britain Might Still be Contracting

During the last few months and with the help of local Wildlife Trust volunteers, we have been revisiting many of the sites across England and Wales where dormice were found in 1993, discovered as a result of the first Great Nut Hunt carried out that year. We needed to know if signs of dormouse could still be found at these sites, as this is an important way of monitoring how well dormouse populations are doing and assessing any changes in their distribution since then. (A number of the 1993 sites had already been revisited as part of the second Great Nut Hunt launched in the autumn of 2001 and we were covering those sites not revisited by our Nutters).

Volunteers were asked to look for chewed hazel nuts underneath heavily fruited trees and to collect opened and unopened nuts. Nuts with typical dormouse teethmarks were evidence that dormice were still present at the site. Dormouse populations were assumed to have become extinct at sites where no dormouse-chewed nuts were found. Also, woodland management features were measured for each site, to help us understand better which woodland practices are most beneficial for dormouse survival.

Overall, dormouse presence was not detected at



51% of all the revisited sites, which suggests that dormouse distribution in Britain might still be contracting. Most of the sites where local population extinctions have occurred were where coniferous cover was 50% or more of the wood. This provides evidence that dormouse populations are less likely to persist at coniferous sites, where the great variety of food sources they need to feed on is harder to find. Also, the dormouse was most likely to have survived in actively managed sites, supporting the claim that decline in woodland management during the recent past has been a major factor contributing to dormouse decline in Britain.

This study suggests that dormouse distribution in Britain might still be contracting. The percentage of coniferous cover within a wood and woodland management practices are important factors in determining whether or not dormice persist. More sites still need to be revisited to confirm these findings.

Alejandra Garrido, Royal Holloway, University of London



Dormouse Nestbox Fund

In our last issue we wrote that, unfortunately, there wasn't yet a specific fund to which monitors could apply for help with buying nestboxes and the other equipment needed to run local monitoring schemes. But now we have some good news to report. PTES fundraisers have succeeded in attracting two grants to get such a fund off to a flying start. Center Parcs and the Valerie White Memorial Fund have both made donations in the last few weeks.

Funds will, first of all, be used to acquire the large number of boxes needed each year at the reintroduction sites. It may also be possible to provide some small measures of help to those of you needing to replace boxes if they're broken or damp. Get in touch with Susan Sharafi at PTES (address on back page). We will obviously have to look carefully at all the requests and list them in order of priority. We'll be asking Paul Bright and Tony Mitchell-Jones at English Nature to help us make the best use of the funds available.

Efforts continue to attract more help. We'll keep you informed.

In autumn, when the dormice have left their summer homes to go to ground for the winter, remember to check your boxes and see what condition they are in. If they are damp or damaged, you should plan to replace them.