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NATURAL ENGLAND

National Dormouse Monitoring Programme (NDMP)

Survey guidelines and recording forms

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Thank you very much for participating in the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme (NDMP) and good luck with this season's nest box checks.

Don't forget that you need a licence to handle dormice. These are granted by Natural England (NE) **www.gov.uk/wildlife-licences** or Natural Resources Wales (NRW) **www.naturalresourceswales.gov.uk**

If you are training towards your dormouse licence, or just need a refresher on techniques, there is a lot of useful information on our website – **www.ptes.org/dormousetraining.** Please take a look at our videos on how to check boxes, handling, weighing and sexing animals and recording your data. You can also download our Dormouse Training Log to record your progress towards your licence.

For detailed information on dormouse ecology and conservation as well as setting up NDMP sites please see *The Dormouse Conservation Handbook:* **https://ptes.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Dormouse-Conservation-Handbook.pdf**

Happy dormousing!

People's Trust for Endangered Species
3 Cloisters House, 8 Battersea Park Road, London SW8 4BG

www.ptes.org
enquiries@ptes.org
020 7498 4533

facebook.com/ptes.org
twitter.com/PTES

Registered charity no. 274206

Setting up a dormouse monitoring site

Please let us know if you are thinking of setting up a new site so that we can check the location, register the site into the NDMP and give you a login for the online data entry pages. The best way to do this is to contact susan.sharafi@ptes.org for a site registration form. If you are looking for a location to set up a new site please get in touch also as we may be able to help you to find a site that needs a new monitor or one that has signs of dormice but is not yet in the NDMP.

An ideal site should have 50 or more dormouse nest boxes, spaced about 10-20m apart in parallel lines, which should also be 10-20m apart. This can either be in one large grid system or in smaller grids throughout the wood. Sites with fewer than 50 boxes, for example if the site isn't big enough to fit this many in, can still be entered into the NDMP – please just let us know.

The nest boxes should be sited in hazel trees where possible, or other shrubs or young trees which are well linked to the adjacent understorey and canopy.

The most convenient height for the nest boxes is about 1.2 to 1.5m off the ground, about chest height. Having boxes at this height also maintains consistency across NDMP sites. Nest boxes can be tied to trees or shrubs with plastic coated wire or thick elastic bungee cord, so that they can be lifted down easily.

Number the boxes sequentially with waterproof ink – it's useful to mark the number on several sides of the box and the lid. Make a map showing the location of each numbered box - it can be helpful to note what tree type the box is on, or nearby features.

For more details please see pages 25 to 30 of *The Dormouse Conservation Handbook*.

Preparing for your box checks

As a minimum two box checks should be carried out during the year, one in either May or June (pre-breeding) and then one in either September or October (post-breeding). If you are able to carry out more visits nest boxes can be checked once a month between the months of April to November inclusive.

Box checks should be carried out between the 15th and 25th of the month.

Try to carry out the checks in the morning if possible, in order not to miss torpid dormice - they tend to warm up about midday.

For each check you will need at least two large clear polythene bags in which you can place and open any nest boxes containing dormice, a supply of small clear polythene bags for weighing animals, scales (weighing in half grams up to 50g) and a bung to block the box holes.

You will also need sufficient copies of the recording forms, a clipboard, pens/pencils and maps of your site and box locations.

You may also wish to take out equipment for clearing and repairing boxes such as a paint scraper, hammer, screwdriver, bungee cord or plastic coated wire, wood staples or screws, wire cutters and a permanent marker.

The survey forms

There are three types of form we would like completed: the **Nest box check summary form**, the **Dormouse recording form** and the **Other mammals recording form**. This document along with the survey forms can be found on our website www.ptes.org/dormice

Dormouse recording form

This is for the details of each dormouse seen or for dormouse nests with no dormouse present. Please start a new sheet for each visit date. You only need to create a record for boxes which contain either dormice or dormouse nests.

Please record:

- the box number and the time it was opened
- the total number of dormice in the box or whether there was just a dormouse nest

Then for each individual dormouse record:

- **Sex** (this may be very difficult for juveniles less than about 7g):
  M - male
  F - female
  U - unknown

- **Weight** to the nearest 0.5g (minus the weighing bag):

- **Status**:
  T - torpid
  A - active
  D - dead

- **Breeding condition**:
  TS - male with testes scrotal
  P - pregnant female
  L - lactating female
  PL - female post lactation, sometimes without young
  NB - non-breeding
  U - unknown (please use only if you cannot provide a best guess)

- **Age class**:
  Adult - an animal that has survived at least one winter. Fur orange-brown
  Pink - new born with no sign of fur (approx. weight 1g-2.5g)
  GEC - grey fur and eyes still closed (approx. weight 2.5g-6g)
  EO - eyes open, grey/brown fur, not weaned (approx. weight 6g-10g)
  Juv - independent juvenile ie young of the year, appearance similar to adult but fur more grey/brown (approx. weight 10g upwards)
  U - unknown (please use only if you cannot provide a best guess)

- **Comments**: Record anything of interest here, such as truncated tails, white tipped tails, if the dormouse escaped, if there was no nest in the box etc.

Nest box check summary form

This summarises all the nest box checks you make at an NDMP site in one year. Please complete a line for each visit, even if you haven't found any dormice.

For each visit record:

- Date of check
- Start and end time
- Total number of boxes checked
- Total number of dormice seen (including young, escaped or dead animals)
- Total number of dormouse nests found in boxes which do not also contain a dormouse

A note on recording litters

Recording data on litter sizes and weights of young is important as this information can provide a good indication of breeding success and therefore how dormice are faring.

Females with very small young should be disturbed as little as possible but it is very useful if you can at least record the age class and the minimum number present e.g. 2+ pinks. If you are unable to count the young in the nest please still record them as 1 individual (as well as any adults present) stating that they were not counted in the comments.

If the young are pink please do not disturb the nest box any further. Leave the animals in the nest and replace it back onto the tree as quickly as possible. For older age classes we recommend the following;

Grey with eyes closed (GEC):

- Count the young leaving them in the nest as long as possible
- Quickly weigh 1-3 of the young together and calculate the average weight (make a note on the recording form that you have taken an average)
- If there is an adult female present that is reluctant to come out do not disturb her further and just record on the form that there was an adult present
- Return the young to the nest as quickly as possible and then return any adults.

Eyes open (EO):

- To get an accurate count you will probably need to take them all out of the box.
- Weigh the young together or in two or three batches and take an average weight (make a note on the recording form that you have taken an average)
- Weigh and sex any adults present and return them to the nest after the young have been returned.

Other mammals recording form

Please ensure that you record other mammal species you find using the nest boxes.

As a minimum you only need to record the box number, species and the number of animals per box, but if you can weigh and sex them that data would be very useful too.

Box checking best practice

Please take a look at the dormouse training section of our website which has useful guidance videos and presentations for both new trainees and existing licence holders – www.ptes.org/dormousetraining. This will help to refresh your memory of the box checking process and includes information on how to age, sex and weigh animals.

To ensure minimal disturbance to dormice please:

- make sure everyone is as quiet as possible throughout the check to minimise the chances of dormice escaping – try not to call out to other members of the team
- when putting the bung in the nest box hole make sure you can see it, rather than feel for it, to ensure no dormice are trying to get out and get trapped
- ensure the bung is in place before opening the box lid
- you may like to use clear perspex squares to slide over the top of the open nest box to get a better look without the risk of animals escaping
- if you need to take the nest box off the tree for a full check make sure it is resting on a flat piece of ground and in a large clear plastic bag first
- carry out the check as close to the tree that the box was on so that if any animals escape they will hopefully climb into a tree they are familiar with
- if the nest box has a removable rather than hinged lid check the underside and if it's clear then take it right out of the bag before checking the nest
- if the nest box has a hinged lid hold it open through the plastic bag to make sure it doesn't suddenly drop down, potentially injuring dormice

- remove the bung from the box and bag to prevent the dormice hiding inside it
- roll your sleeves up – dormice find it easier to run up material than bare skin and they also like running up inside them!
- try not to ruin the structure of the nest whilst checking for animals – gently feel for the central nesting chamber and then around the edge of the nest in all the corners. If it feels empty it is okay to carefully take the whole nest out to check underneath
- if a dormouse jumps out of the box onto the ground make sure everyone stands still whilst the most experienced person tries to catch it. If it isn't caught quite quickly put the box back and move away carefully
- take particular care not to handle dormice by the tail, as the skin is easily stripped off and does not regrow. Do not scruff dormice either
- before putting the animals back in the nest box make sure there is a clear route for them to get back into the central chamber
- when putting animals back in the nest box make sure the lid is on securely and post them gently through the hole at the back, blowing their tail to make them pull it in before putting the bung back in
- when putting mothers and young back in the nest boxes place the young in first then post the mother back through the hole at the back
- don't forget at the end of the box check to count the bungs back in to ensure none have been left in the back of any nest boxes!

Nest box hygiene:

- clear boxes of all material over the winter months of December, January or February unless dormice are present
- during the rest of the year remove all damp, smelly, infested or rotting nesting material (unless a dormouse is present) and any dead animals discovered (this may include wood mouse or other nests. This prevents dormice getting mites or parasites and will prolong the life of the nest boxes. Dilapidated and old boxes should be replaced as dormice may be less inclined to use them
- it is recommended to remove all terrestrial mammal species other than dormice from nest boxes except if young are present. Do not remove or disturb bats
- do not remove birds' nests during the bird breeding season as it is an offense to damage or destroy an active nest
- use separate bags for each monitoring site to reduce the risk of cross site contamination. We recommend using disinfectant hand gel if working between sites and disposing of any bags and bungs if you find a sick animal during a box check
- if working between woodlands, footwear and tools should be cleaned and disinfected with *Cleankill* sanitising spray. This is known to be effective againt *phytophthora* spores.

Returning records

Please return all your records by 1st December each year. Even if you didn't find any animals during your box checks we would still like to know about the visits you made during the year.

The best way for you to submit your records is via our online recording site at www.ptes.org/dormousemonitoring. Please contact susan.sharafi@ptes.org for a login if you do not already have one, if you have forgotten your login or are having any problems with the site.

Records can be entered anytime throughout the year – either after you have done each check or all at the end of the season. If you are unable to submit your records online please send the paper forms to us at the address on the forms.

Health and Safety

Please read through the health and safety for volunteers section of our website – www.ptes.org/healthandsafety

In particular please take the time to look at the potential risks for survey volunteers below and fill in a **Risk assessment record form** for your site.

Please note that the list of potential risks is not intended to be completely exhaustive and is for guidance on the most common hazards only. It is important that you assess each site individually as each site is unique.

As many NDMP sites are remote you should consider how the emergency services might reach you if there is an accident. Make sure you know the nearest postcode to your site and the OS grid reference, and note the closest hospital with A&E. Remember this information should be available to all, as accidents can happen to anybody.

If in doubt about any aspect of health and safety relating to a site, always seek further advice from us before proceeding with the visit. Please remember that as a volunteer you are under no obligation to take part in this scheme and you should not put yourself or any others in danger.

Hazard	**Precautions to be taken to remove hazard or reduce risk level (one precaution may tackle several hazards)**
Danger of injury through accident	• Identify potential hazards • Wear appropriate footwear for the location/terrain & weather conditions • Avoid well known danger spots. Do not cross railway lines or other potentially hazardous sites e.g. quarries, ravines • Carry a torch & spare batteries if working late afternoon, a compass &, when in remote areas, a change of clothes • Talk to landowners about the location of potentially hazardous animals • Avoid contact with animals & dung
Inclement weather	• Wear appropriate clothing for the time of year, and be prepared for weather changes • Carry waterproof &/or warm clothing. Hazards can increase significantly in heavy rain, strong wind & thunderstorms • Avoid/terminate all outside activity in inclement weather
Uneven ground	• Identify potential hazards • Wear sturdy boots or shoes • Use footpaths where possible • No distracting work should be carried out while walking
Traffic hazards	• High visibility clothing should be worn whenever working in the vicinity of roads and someone else should keep watch for traffic
Lyme's disease	• When working in grassland areas where deer are present, wear long trousers & long socks. Check exposed skin for ticks. If a tick is found & you contract flu-like symptoms, tell your doctor that you may have been exposed to Lyme's disease
Tetanus & leptospirosis	• While not common, these diseases can have severe effects, and in rare cases result in death. Clean any cuts etc immediately with clean water & cover adequately • Ensure that your anti-tetanus treatments are up-to-date (normally within last 10 years) • Avoid contact with water, particularly if contaminated with cattle/rat urine. Wash hands thoroughly & always before eating or smoking. If you contract flu-like symptoms, tell your doctor that you may have been exposed to Weil's disease

Hazard	Precautions to be taken to remove hazard or reduce risk level (one precaution may tackle several hazards)
Alcohol & drugs	• Anyone under the adverse influence of alcohol or drugs is not permitted to take part in any PTES activities. If you are using prescribed drugs, seek medical advice on any side effects that may affect your performance (eg drowsiness)
Lone Working & Personal attack	• Working alone should be avoided. Try to work in a pair. If this is not possible, always notify someone (partner, friend, neighbour) where you are going and when you expect to be back. Agree on a course of action if you have not returned home by the time you stated • Lone workers should be aware of the location of the nearest house or phone so that help can be called if required. In general, anyone working alone, or those working on sites remote from the emergency services, should carry a mobile phone. This should be tested at the start of the visit to detect reception blind spots
Getting lost	• Use a map and compass if necessary • Use a mobile phone in an emergency
Risk of drowning	• Non-swimmers should be accompanied when walking by water • Do not cross rivers unless by bridge • Avoid work when risk of flooding & be aware of tides • Keep at safe distance from bank/cliff/water edge
Fencing	• Be aware and avoid touching or climbing over electric fences • Be aware and avoid touching or climbing over barbed-wire fences, please make sure your tetanus vaccine is up to date
Trees	• Be aware of low, fallen branches and take care to avoid them • Be aware of hanging branches and trees and avoid the area • Cease activity in high winds and thunderstorms
Box checks	• Be aware of other wildlife that may be using boxes • Be aware that bees, wasps & hornets may use boxes; identify at the start of a box check whether anyone is allergic to stings

National Dormouse Monitoring Programme

Nest box check summary form

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Please complete a line of this form for each check you make of your dormouse nest boxes during the season, even if you do not find any dormice.
N.B. *The total number of dormice recorded should be the same as the number entered on your Dormouse recording form for that date, and should include young, escaped or dead dormice.

Site name: ..... Site no.: ..... Monitor: ..... email: .....

Sub-section (if relevant): .....

Date of box check	Start time	End time	No. of boxes checked	Total no. of dormice recorded*	Total no. of dormouse nests found **without** dormice present	Comments

Please submit your data by 1st December each year
Enter online at www.ptes.org/dormousemonitoring or send to Susan Sharafi, PTES, 3 Cloisters House, 8 Battersea Park Road, London, SW8 4BG or email susan.sharafi@ptes.org

National Dormouse Monitoring Programme

Dormouse recording form

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Date (dd/mm/yy): .... Site name: ....

Site no.: .... Monitor: .... Total no. of boxes checked ....

Box no. / Time	**No. of dormice** (no. or 'nest')	**Sex** (M, F or U)	**Weight** (in g)	**Status** Torpid (T), Active (A) or Dead (D)	**Breeding condition** (TS, PL, NB or U)	**Age class** (Pink, GEC, EO, Juv or Adult)	**Comments**

Please submit your data by 1st December each year. Enter online at www.ptes.org/dormousemonitoring or send to Susan Sharafi, PTES, 3 Cloisters House, 8 Battersea Park Road, London, SW8 4BG or email susan.sharafi@ptes.org

National Dormouse Monitoring Programme

Other mammals recording form

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Date (dd/mm/yy): .... Site name: ....

Site no.: .... Monitor: .... Total no. of boxes checked ....

Box no.	Species	No. of individuals	**Sex** (M, F or U)	**Weight** (in g)	**Breeding condition** (TS, P, L, NB or U)	Comments

Please submit your data by 1st December each year. Enter online at www.ptes.org/dormousemonitoring or send to Susan Sharafi, PTES, 3 Cloisters House, 8 Battersea Park Road, London, SW8 4BG or email susan.sharafi@ptes.org

Risk assessment record

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Remember that each site and survey type is unique and should be assessed individually. Please read through the information on our website www.ptes.org/heathandsafety. The 'Potential risks for survey volunteers' document can help you identify potential hazards.

The risk assessment record should be completed and retained by you.

If you are working at remote survey sites you should consider how the emergency services might reach you if there is an accident. This information should be available to all members of a group, as accidents can happen to anybody.

Activity / workplace assessed:	Assessor:	Assessment date:

General information Site name: Nearest postcode: Grid reference: Access information:	Assessor contact number:	Local A&E:

The three columns overleaf (L,S,R) are for assessing the level or degree of risk. The first (L) is for an assessment of the likelihood of the hazard taking place, the second (S) for the severity of the hazard, based on the following:

L	Likelihood
1	Hazard exists very infrequently; limited numbers exposed
2	Likely to occur; hazard exists intermittently or occurs occasionally
3	Likely to occur soon; permanent hazard or occurs daily/repeatedly; many may be exposed

S	Severity of hazard
1	Could cause minor injury only
2	Could cause major injury/3+ days absence
3	Could cause severe injury/fatality

R	Risk level = L multiplied by S
1 or 2	Low risk
3 or 4	Moderate risk
5 to 9	Very high risk

VERY HIGH RISKS NEED IMMEDIATE ACTION

Risk assessment record

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Hazard	Will effect	Precautions and / or controls already in place to remove hazard or reduce risk level	Risk (with controls)			Additional controls needed
			L	S	R (LxS)	

The three columns overleaf (L,S,R) are for assessing the level or degree of risk. The first (L) is for an assessment of the likelihood of the hazard taking place, the second (S) for the severity of the hazard, based on the following:

L	**Likelihood**
1	Hazard exists very infrequently; limited numbers exposed
2	Likely to occur; hazard exists intermittently or occurs occasionally
3	Likely to occur soon; permanent hazard or occurs daily/repeatedly; many may be exposed

S	**Severity of hazard**
1	Could cause minor injury only
2	Could cause major injury/3+ days absence
3	Could cause severe injury/fatality

R	**Risk level = L multiplied by S**
1 or 2	Low risk
3 or 4	Moderate risk
5 to 9	Very high risk