Dormouse habitats

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Dormice use far more habitats than we once thought…

From: “Prefer undergrowth in well-established woods”. (1967)

To: Prefer thick bushy growth, whether in woods, hedges or scrub, but can occur in a wide variety of habitats.

Regardless of habitat type, any suitable site has to have:

1. Safe nesting places

Unenclosed active season nest

Active season nest in tree hole

Hibernation nest

And....

2. Continuity of food from spring to autumn

Catkins and flowers

Inverts

Fruits, seeds and nuts

And….

3. Be large or well connected

- Either large single block of favourable habitat (>20ha)
- Or well connected to other quality habitat patches

Favoured habitats

Early to mid-successional dense bushy growth, as found in:

- Scrub
- Hedges
- Coppices
- Woodland edges

Typical site of active season nest

Scrub – a scarce habitat

Abandoned fields (re-wilding)

Coastal scrub

Roads – central reservations!

Optimal scrub

- ✓ Dense
- ✓ Plenty of edge
- ✓ Diversity of shrubs and ramblers, including bramble
- ✓ Well connected

Hedges – can be very favourable

Optimal hedge

- ✓ Wide
- ✓ Dense
- ✓ Diversity of shrubs/trees
- ✓ Outgrowths of bramble, rose or blackthorn
- ✓ Well connected

Hopeless hedges

Broadleaved woodland

Dense shrubby growth as encouraged by:

- coppicing
- natural regeneration
- or ride management

But will use canopy

And tree holes for additional nesting

Optimal woodland

- ✓ Much dense young growth, scrub or bramble
- ✓ Fine scale mosaic (patches <0.5 ha)
- ✓ Diversity of native trees (5+)
- ✓ Full age range – including veterans
- ✓ Continuity of cover between understorey and canopy
- ✓ Large (>20ha) or well connected

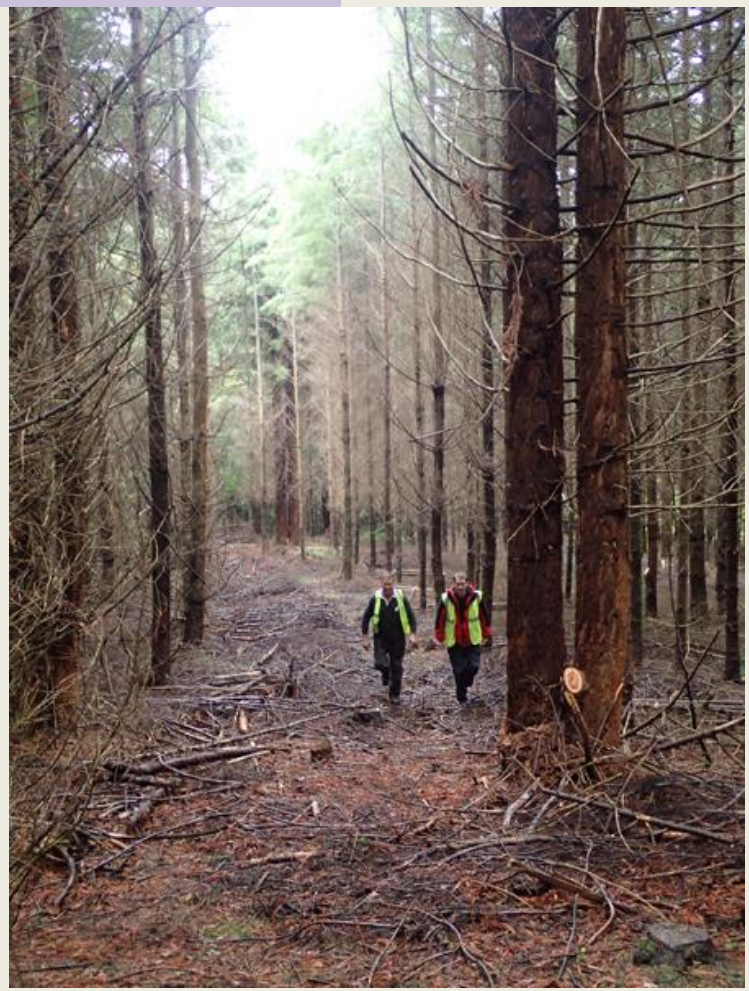
Woodland ride

Photo Simone Bullion

Some sub-optimal habitats:

1. Conifer plantations

Useful habitat



Poor habitat

2. Carr (wet) woodland

3. Gardens

Photo Jen Bousfield

Photo Stephen Carroll

Good garden

- ✓ Well connected with other dormouse habitats
- ✓ High cover of thick hedges, shrubberies and dense borders
- ✓ High proportion of native trees and shrubs
- ✓ Access to high energy foods (e.g. peanuts)

Photo Stephen Carroll

Other habitats used by dormice include:

Reedbed

Nest in bracken

Tussocky grassland

Nest in gorse

Disturbance

- Tolerant of people, dogs and vehicles passing close to active season nests
- Artificial lights and loud noises at night likely to be harmful – but may become habituated
- Hibernation nests vulnerable to trampling and other disturbance – by humans, dogs, game birds, pigs/boars, cattle, etc
- Cats kill some

Management: Three key points

1. **Maintain succession cycle – recognise need for short term decline in habitat patch quality to achieve long-term gain at site level.**

2. **Manage at landscape scale. Expand and connect!**

3. **Diversify native tree and shrub species – for dormice and habitat resilience.**

Woodland management

1. Vary structure - small scale patchwork
2. Thin the canopy – to encourage dense understorey
3. Promote natural regeneration
4. Manage rides for scrubby edges
5. Coppice - with care!

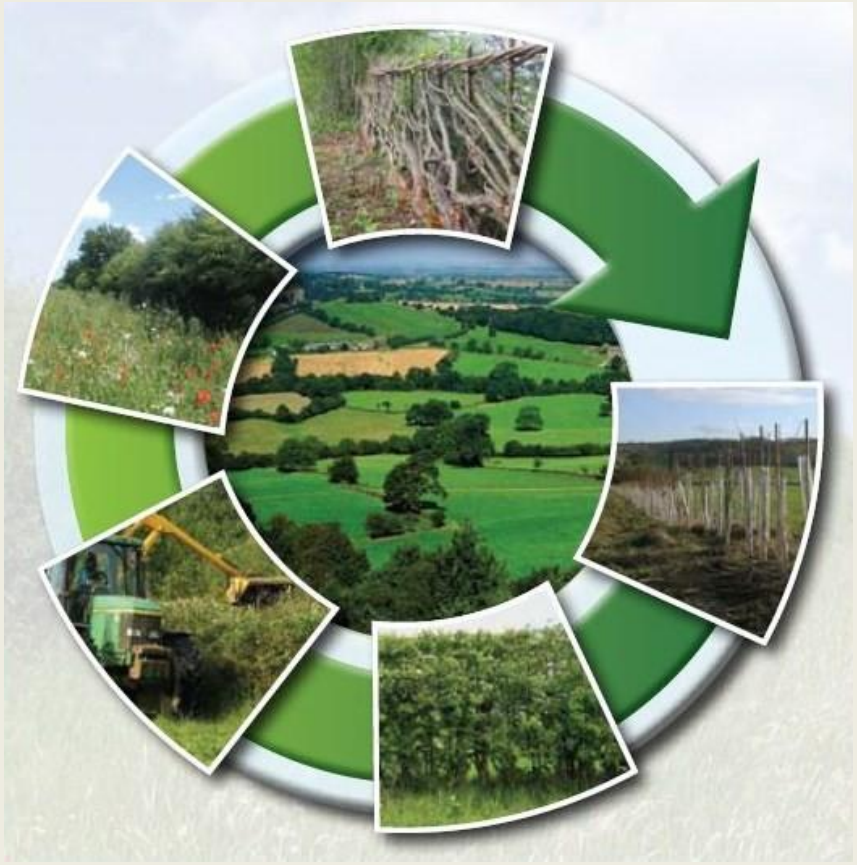
Coppicing can create dense scrubby growth if enough light reaches stools and deer controlled

Photo Simone Bullion

Hazel stands may not be optimal – little cover or diversity

Hedge management

1. Adopt management cycle
2. Rejuvenate by laying/coppicing
3. Trim to keep thick and bushy
4. Encourage bramble/rose/blackthorn outgrowths
5. Rotate at farm/landscape scale



Trim hedges to keep dense

But not all hedges every year!

Scrub management

1. Create fine scale mosaic of linked patches
2. Break up large blocks
3. Rejuvenate to prevent development in woodland
4. Remove shade-bearing trees

In summary

1. ***Dormice can be found in many habitats***
2. ***Scrubby ones are the best***
3. ***For effective conservation, think landscape scale***
4. ***And manage to maintain vegetation succession – think long term***

Thank you