

Checking dormouse boxes

The National Dormouse Monitoring Programme¹ (NDMP)

- 50 boxes in a site with dormice
- Approximately 20m apart
- Check minimum of twice a year in May/June and Sept/October
- Check between 15th and 25th of month
- Record number of dormice and basic biometric data
- Submit results annually to PTES



- Keep quiet to avoid disturbing dormice
- Take only one bung into the wood and make sure you still have it at the end
- Look before putting bung in box so dormice don't get trapped



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- Ensure bung is in place before opening lid.
- You can use a clear perspex square to slide over top of box
- If you see either a nest or some movement in the box, it's worth taking it off the tree to check

What nests you might have

- **Empty**
 - (leave on tree)
- **Birds nest**
 - (leave on tree)
- **Wood mouse nest**
 - (may need checking in bag)
- **Dormouse nest**
 - (will need checking in bag)
- **Other nest**
 - (may need checking in bag)



Empty box

- Check corners – torpid dormice may not have a nest
- Leave any dry, clean matter but remove any damp, dirty and/or smelly material
- Remove bung and leave



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Bird nest

- Usually nest in spring before dormice
- May be moss, feathers, hair, wool, dead grass
- Leave dry clean material
- Do not unduly disturb nesting birds
- Check with site to see if bird data should be recorded



Wood mouse nest

- Usually brown chewed leaves
- No woven structure
- Clear if damp, dirty and/or smelly
- Leave if young present



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Dormouse nest

- Dormice have at least 3 nest types
 - Green leaves
 - Woven structure
 - Green leaves and woven structure
- Key features are either green leaves and/or woven structure
- Record dormouse nests on NDMP form



Checking nest boxes

If there is a nest or movement in the box then:

- Put box in large bag
- Make sure box is stable on ground
- Roll up sleeves
- Remove lid and bung from bag
- Check inside corners of box with fingers then feel inside nest
- Retain integrity of nest



What species you might have

Birds

Wood mice

Yellowneck mice

Bank vole

Pygmy shrew

Dormice

– 1 or 2 animals

- Sexing
- Weighing

– Litter of inactive young

– Litter of active young

– Torpid dormice

Wood mice, bank voles, pygmy shrews

- Record on NDMP 'Other mammals form'
- Useful to practice handling and sexing on mice and voles
- Hold by scruffing
- Record sex and weight if desired



Dormice – 1 or 2 animals

- If no other dormice in bag remove box and bung from bag
- Prepare box for animals' return
 - Ensure easy access into nest from entrance hole
 - Secure lid
- Catch animal in bag to sex then weigh
- **Record data on NDMP form**
- Return to box in large bag posting through entrance hole, **be careful of the tail**, block hole with bung
- Replace box on tree, tidy up, **remove bung** as you walk away



Putting them back



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Dormice – Sexing



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Female: no gap



Male: small gap

- Catch dormice in 'loose fist'
- Allow them to run between your hands to get them on their back and nose under thumb
- Roll tail down to sex
- Look at the distance between the anus and the urinary opening

Dormice – Weighing

- Transfer animals after sexing to small weigh bag
- Weigh using spring balance
- Keep hand under bag in case scale slips
- Note bag weight, total weight - **Record animal weight**



Dormice – litter of inactive young

- Mother may be reluctant to come out
- Record young age (Pink or GEC)
- Count if possible
- If confident and can work quickly:
 - Weigh and confirm sex of mother
 - Weigh one or two youngsters and give average weight
- **Important to record young age**



Age Class: Pink
Approx. 0 – 6 days old, 1-2.5g

Dormice – litter of active young

- Encourage some animals out of nest then bung box and put in another large bag
- Sex and weigh individuals and leave in weigh bags secured with wire tag
- Process remainder of animals
- Prepare box when empty and start to return animals
- Record age, weight and sex
 - Grey eyes open GEC
 - Eyes open EO
 - Juvenile
 - Adult



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Torpid dormice

- Once torpid dormice have been disturbed they will wake up. It takes about 20 minutes
- Weigh them in weigh bags
- Sex carefully
- In addition to recording usual biometric data record torpor





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Age Class: Grey eyes closed
Approx. 6 – 16 days old, 2.5 - 6g



© Nora Wuttke

Age Class: Eyes open
Approx. 16 – 28 days old, 6 - 10g



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Age Class: Juvenile (pre hibernation)
Approx. 28+ days old, 10g +



© Ian White

Age Class: Adult (post hibernation)
Approx. 8-12mths +, 12g +

Nest box hygiene

- Clear boxes of all material over the winter months unless dormice are present
- Then clear boxes only of damp, smelly, infested or rotting nest material and any dead animals
- Remove all terrestrial mammals from boxes except if young are present
- Use separate bags for each monitoring site

For more information look at the

National Dormouse Monitoring Programme

Survey Guidelines

or contact enquiries@ptes.org



Bringing the wild back to life