

## **National Dormouse Monitoring during Covid-19 pandemic**

SARS-CoV-2 is the name given to the newly evolved coronavirus that is responsible for the Covid-19 global pandemic in humans. Coronaviruses are capable of infecting avian and mammalian species and causing a variety of diseases. ZSL has completed a disease risk assessment with respect to hazel dormice and made a number of suggestions to minimise risk that form the basis of our comments below. If you would like to read the full Dormouse DRA please email [ian.white@ptes.org](mailto:ian.white@ptes.org)

### **General conclusion**

A number of reports have highlighted the ability of SARS-CoV-2 to infect a small number of non-human mammalian hosts such as domestic cats and domestic dogs.

In rodent families closely related to dormice, SARS-CoV-2 has been shown to infect and cause disease in both hamsters and mice. The susceptibility of mammals, to infection with SARS-CoV-2 suggests that free-living wild mammals, including rodents such as the hazel dormouse, may be susceptible to infection and disease, but occurrences are likely to be rare. To date there has been no evidence of coronavirus infection in hazel dormice. The risk of transmission is considered to be low but some precautions are suggested.

### **Dormouse exposure assessment**

Fieldworkers routinely check footprint tunnels and nest boxes for signs of dormouse activity. If fieldworkers are infected with SARS-CoV-2 there is considered to be a low likelihood that hazel dormice will be exposed to SARS-CoV-2 from fieldworkers in this situation.

To undertake an NDMP check, fieldworkers *handle* dormice in order to carry out routine visual examinations and to obtain a body weight. If fieldworkers are infected with SARS-CoV-2 there is considered a medium likelihood that hazel dormice will be exposed to SARS-CoV-2 in this situation.

Based on the current understanding of SARS-CoV-2, there is a high likelihood of exposure, infection and dissemination of SARS-CoV-2 in the human population and a medium likelihood that hazel dormice will become exposed and infected through human fieldwork activities at conservation sites. There is a low likelihood that SARS-CoV-2 will disseminate through the hazel dormouse population.

### **Risk mitigation**

While there is currently no evidence that people can transmit SARS-CoV-2 to dormice, nor that dormice are a source of infection to people, we believe it sensible to take some reasonable precautions.

1. If you, or anyone in your household, is showing any signs of Covid -19, remain at home, do not undertake any fieldwork.
2. It is important to follow current guidelines from the English and Welsh governments.
3. All people checking boxes should wear a mask and well-fitting latex gloves, or similar, and carry a hand sanitiser such as Sterillium. Hands should be washed, or sanitised, before the check starts.
4. While undertaking fieldwork activities, avoid touching personal items such as watches and mobile phones.
5. If you don't wish to handle dormice, the minimum information required for the NDMP is the number of dormice, whether they are torpid or active, and their age.
6. If you do wish to handle dormice and collect the biometric data for the NDMP, dormice should be handled for the minimal amount of time.
7. After every box of animals is recorded, and at the end of the check, gloves or hands should be washed with a hand sanitiser such as Sterillium, used liberally.
8. Moving survey or monitoring equipment between sites should be avoided where possible. If it is deemed necessary any dormouse tunnels, tubes or boxes should be sterilised with Safe4 (at a dilution of 1:50 as this disinfectant is safe for animals in direct contact and is biodegradable and considered safe for the environment.
9. All bags, masks, gloves, scales etc. should either be disposed of, or washed/sanitised (as appropriate) at the end of a check.
10. At the end of the check, change clothes as soon as is practicable and wash those worn on the check as soon as possible.

**Thank you for reading this guidance and for keeping our wildlife as safe.**