



Hazel dormouse

(*Muscardinus avellanarius*)

GB IUCN status **Vulnerable** (Evidence to suggest an Endangered Red List status in England)

General information

Hazel dormice are small nocturnal rodents that live, feed and breed in the tree and shrub canopy when they are active between late April and late October. They build summer and breeding nests in tree holes, old bird nests, dense scrub and nest boxes.

Hazel dormice generally have only a single litter of four to five young born between late July and September. It takes about two months for the young to become fully independent before they start to disperse. In late autumn they come down to the ground, build a small nest and go into hibernation for the duration of the winter and start to become active again in mid to late April.

Habitat Requirements

Dormice have a long association with hazel coppice woodlands but that is due as much to where they were found due to human activity as to where they occurred naturally. Dormice generally live in old, managed, deciduous woodland with a vigorous understory, but also occur in scrub habitats, hedgerows and conifer plantations.

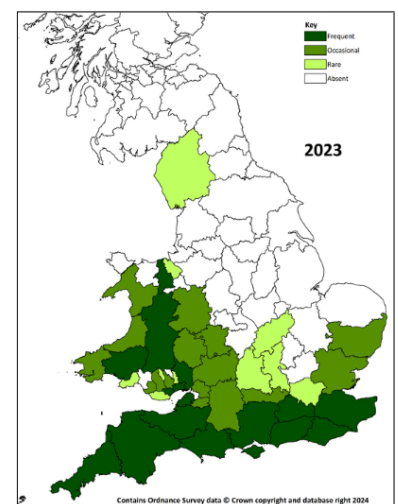
Species Pressures

The National Dormouse Monitoring Programme has recorded a 70% decline in dormouse populations in the UK between 2000-2022. The main threats to hazel dormice are a loss of

habitat due to a lack of woodland management and inappropriate hedgerow management and habitat fragmentation that has isolated potentially suitable habitat areas in the landscape. Climate change also has a negative impact on dormice with mild, wetter winters affecting overwinter survival and wetter springs and summers affecting breeding success.

Distribution

In Victorian times, hazel dormice were widespread throughout England and Wales but over the past century, they have declined in both range and population. They are now found predominantly in the southern counties of England and throughout Wales. They are found in the border counties and in Shropshire, Suffolk and Essex. A single, known native population still exists in Cumbria. Dormice have been reintroduced into North Yorkshire, Warwickshire and Lincolnshire.



Hazel dormouse UK range map generated from 2019-2023 National Dormouse Database data. Frequent >30 sites, Occasional 6-30 sites, Rare <6 sites, Absent no sites.

Conservation Actions 'Potential Measures'

Managing woodlands for dormice:

- Selective felling, coppicing and ride management to increase the extent, diversity and connectivity of understory in woodlands. Maintain and improve woodland rides and woodland edges by opening the canopy, to limit over-shading
- Managing deer populations, which can inhibit understory development due to browsing.

Increase suitable habitat by:

- Planting diverse well-managed woodlands, encouraging mixed scrub habitat and planting hedgerows.
- Managing hedgerows on their lifecycle through laying and gapping up.

Improving habitat connectivity:

- Identifying isolated patches of habitat and increasing surrounding extent, size, diversity and connectivity of hedgerows.
- Identifying areas where scrub habitat patches can be encouraged to improve landscape connectivity.
- Ensuring hedgerows are managed on their lifecycle through laying and gapping up.

