Help us find hazel dormice

people's trust for endangered species

Dormice are rather sleepy creatures for much of the year. They spend as much as six months of each year in hibernation, curled up safely away from the harshest winter weather, under a pile of leaves in the base of a hedge or tree. Before tucking themselves away, dormice fatten up on fruits, berries and nuts so they have enough energy stored to see them through the winter months of inactivity.

Why do we need to know where dormice are?

Dormice are declining in the UK, but we're lucky to still have some in Porlock Vale. We hope to find more places where dormice are present so that we can help and advise woodland owners on how to look after dormice on their land and monitor their well-being.





Rhys Owen Roberts

How do we find dormice?

Dormice are normally active at night, so it's unusual to come across one by chance. Luckily, dormice open hazelnuts in a very specific way to get at the kernel within; so by looking at hazelnuts dropped under hazel trees or shrubs we can tell if there have been dormice around, chomping their way through these nuts.





How to get involved

We need people to look for dormouse-nibbled hazel nuts and let us know what they find. A nut hunt is very simple and a great way to spend some time outside on an autumnal or wintery day. It can be a fun family activity too.

If you'd like to take part by searching a woodland in Holnicote then you can either pick a woodland yourself or contact the National Trust to ask about our list of priority woods.

1. Please ask permission first

It's really important that you ask permission from whoever owns the woodland, before you start your nut hunt.

2. Find some hazel

As you'll be looking for hazelnuts, it's important to find hazel trees or shrubs in the woodland. Hazelnuts are most likely to be under these or under hedgerows or in scrubby areas that contain hazel. See guide sheet for identifying hazel.

3. Start searching

When you've found your hazel trees, start collecting the hazelnuts underneath for inspection later. To give us a good idea of whether or not dormice are there, please spend about 20 minutes collecting nuts under each tree, group of trees or section of hedgerow, and look under several trees or groups of trees.

4. Check your hazelnuts and tell us what you find

Once you've completed your search, take the hazelnuts home and use a magnifying glass to identify who has been nibbling them. Dormice aren't the only animal that love hazelnuts. Mice and voles make a similar shaped hole when they gnaw a hazelnut, but it's possible to tell the difference (see opposite).

If you find any hazelnuts that you think may have been eaten by dormice, or you're unsure, please send a small selection of nuts to the us, or email a good quality, close-up photo showing the rim of the nibbled hole, clearly and in focus. To make your efforts worthwhile, we'll also need to know the following:

- Your name and email.
- Exactly where you found the nuts (an Ordnance Survey grid reference is deal, or the name and other defining factors of the location so that we can identify the exact woodland or hedgerow).

These details are really important - without them we won't be able to use the results of your nut hunt to help dormice. We'll also let you know if your hazelnuts were indeed nibbled by a dormouse.

For more information about dormice please visit www.ptes.org/dormice

Where to send your hazelnuts

Post with details to:
Great Nut Hunt, PTES, 3 Cloisters House, 8 Battersea Park Road,London SW8 4BG

Email photos with details to:
enquiries@ptes.org

Dormouse nut hunt guide

How to identify a hazel tree or shrub



Hazel is a small-growing tree, usually with a group of stems rather than a single trunk. Some other trees can also have multiple stems, so check the leaves on the tree or ground to make sure it's hazel. The tree can be found in woodlands, hedgerows or in patches of scrub and occasionally as a lone tree.





Hazel leaves are rounded oval, with a thin pointed tip. They have sharp, irregular, jagged edges and a slightly downy appearance. Looking along a branch from the tip towards where it joins a main tree stem, the leaves (leaf buds in winter) and twigs come off either side in a zig-zag alternate pattern. Hazel has hairy twigs and coppery brown, smooth bark that often peels off.



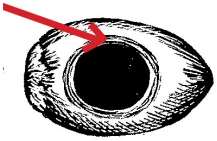
Hazelnuts are 1-2cm long, oval and clustered in groups of 1-4. The nuts are green on the tree, with green leaf-like parts at the base. Dormice sit in the tree to eat the green nuts. When they drop the shell to the floor, it becomes brown like the others that have fallen off.

How to identify a dormouse-nibbled hazelnut

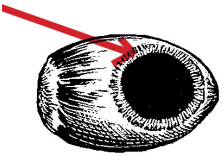
If you find a nut with a neat round hole in the shell, about 8-10mm across, then it's probably been opened by a small rodent. Look carefully at the marks on the edge of the hole to tell which species. Using a magnifying glass, camera lens or binoculars backwards will give you a really good close-up view of the toothmarks.



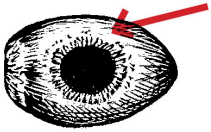
Dormouse-chewed hazelnuts have a smooth inner rim with toothmarks at an angle to the hole on the nut surface and look a little like a clog.



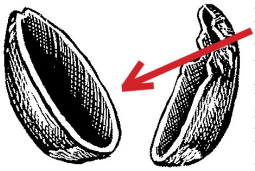
Vole-chewed hazelnuts have toothmarks across the inner rim of the nut but don't leave any marks on the surface, around the edge of the hole.







Wood mouse-chewed hazelnuts have toothmarks both on the inner rim of the nut and also on the surface, around the edge of the hole.



As squirrels and birds are larger and stronger than small rodents, they simply crack a hazelnut open, shattering the shell.

The not-so-exciting but REALLY IMPORTANT bits for your nut-hunting

Access

- Remember that most woodland is privately owned
- Always ask the owner's permission before carrying out your nut hunt (often finding the nearest farmhouse can help with this)
- If the owner would like more information about nut hunts, please give them our details
- Tell the owner or occupier what you find – they'll probably be interested to know more about the wildlife in their wood

Follow the Countryside Code

Respect other people

- Consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors
- Leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available

Protect the natural environment

- Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under effective control

Enjoy the outdoors

- Plan ahead and be prepared
- Follow advice and local signs

Your own safety

Please take care when searching for hazelnuts

- Watch your footing and look out for dead tree limbs overhead
- Only carry out a nut hunt in daylight hours and not in bad weather
- Ensure you wash your hands after your nut hunt and before eating or drinking

For more information, search online for The Countryside Code.

Don't forget to send us a selection of any dormouse-nibbled nuts you find, or any you're unsure of.



Tony Wallpalove

The hazel dormouse is a protected species under European and British law. If you come across one, please let us know and leave it in peace unless it's obviously sick or injured. Sometimes dormice are disturbed by hedge cutting – if you find one this way with babies, or an injured dormouse, please contact your nearest wildlife hospital.

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