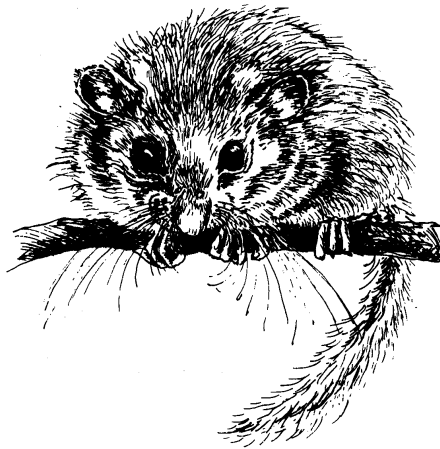


Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan

Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*)



The dormouse has suffered a serious decline in distribution in the UK and until recently were thought to be extinct from Shropshire. This decline in range and probably numbers is the result of a number of factors including loss and fragmentation of habitat. Dormice are strongly associated with ancient woodlands, both deciduous and coniferous. They are also commonly found in mature hedgerows and scrub areas. With sufficient light, shrubs show an increase in flowering and fruiting, and this is beneficial to dormice.

Dormice are nocturnal animals that are only active for five months of the year. They live at low densities, are poor colonisers and have a low reproductive rate. Dormice are specialist feeders and eat a variety of flowers, fruits and insects. Within their small territories they build several nests: summer shelter and breeding nests are usually above ground in tangles of vegetation or tree holes, and winter hibernation nests are normally at ground level but have been known in tree holes.

1 Objectives and Targets

1.1 Objectives

- A. Maintain existing populations and range of dormice in Shropshire, ensuring no further loss or fragmentation.
- B. Enhance the status of dormice in Shropshire by re-establishing previously occupied sites and creation of appropriate new habitat.
- C. Establish and maintain a comprehensive understanding of dormice distribution, status and ecological requirements in Shropshire through research, survey and monitoring.
- D. Promote communication, education and awareness of th
- E. e status and needs of the dormouse.

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1.2 Targets

- Enhance at least five existing dormice sites through habitat creation and appropriate management by 2005.
- Select at least one site to demonstrate best practice in habitat management for dormice by 2005.
- Survey an additional 25 potential sites each year from 2002.
- Provide training for all organisations involved with dormice sites in Shropshire by 2005.
- Produce a leaflet on dormice ecology and conservation requirements by 2005.

2 Current Status

2.1 Importance

The dormouse is a priority species in the UK Biodiversity Programme and a national species action plan has been written. Dormice have statutory protection nationally and in Europe.

The status of the dormouse in Shropshire is not fully known but they are undoubtedly vulnerable. They are often found in woods that are isolated and not appropriately managed for the conservation of dormice.

2.2 Trends

Dormice have been lost from 7 counties since the turn of the century, a 50% reduction in range. In Shropshire many sites have been lost and there is also evidence of temporary losses from woodlands such as Hugelth and Hope Valley where dormice were not recorded for several years. Loss is often due to inappropriate woodland management and return of dormice due to the expansion of existing populations on adjacent sites.

2.3 Population and Distribution

Dormice in the UK are on the northwest edge of their European range. In the UK, dormice are mainly found in southern England, with small populations in northern counties such as Cumbria and Northumberland.

In Shropshire dormice are mainly found in the southwest of the county. Records are centred on Clun, Wenlock Edge and Habberley. Large areas such as Bridgnorth to Cleobury and Mortimer and Chirbury to Church Stoke have not yet been surveyed to determine distribution in more detail.

3 Current Factors Affecting the Species

- Climate – Conditions such as wet, cold summers, mild winters and early frost are unfavourable for dormice. Their distribution corresponds to areas with less than 100mm annual rainfall and a mean July temperature of 16.5°C.

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- Ecological requirements and characteristics – Dormice are active only 5 months each year, require a diverse, continuous shrub layer, are poor colonisers, and have low reproductive rates.
- Habitat loss – Dormice are strongly associated with ancient woodland, scrub and old hedgerow systems. Ancient woodland and old hedgerows have declined significantly during the past 50 years.
- Habitat management – Inappropriate management of woodlands and hedgerows has made these habitats less suitable for dormice. Dense, even-aged woodlands with poor or undeveloped shrub layers are sub-optimal for dormice.
- Competitors and grazing – Free-ranging stock and deer can damage the shrub layer in woodlands, eliminating valuable food such as fruits and flowers; grey squirrels often out-compete dormice for hazelnuts, a valuable pre-hibernation food source.
- Habitat fragmentation and isolation – Destruction of woodlands leads to fragmentation and loss of suitable dormouse habitat.
- Lack of site protection – There are no sites in Shropshire protected or managed primarily for dormice.

4 Current Action

4.1 Policy and Protection

- The dormouse is protected by the Bonn Convention and EC Habitats Directive.
- The dormouse is fully protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and Schedule 2 of The Habitat Regulations 1994. However dormice sites can still be damaged through inappropriate management unless designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or as candidate Special Areas for Conservation.
- The Hedgerow Regulations 1997 protect some hedgerows from damaging operations and therefore benefit dormice.

4.2 Management, Research and Survey

- Grant-aid for habitat management from Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) and Woodland Grant schemes can improve the value of woodlands and hedgerows for dormice.
- A pilot management plan by Shropshire County Council at Polesgate Farm in the Shropshire Hills ESA promotes favourable land management for dormice and other species.
- The National Dormouse Monitoring Scheme funded by English Nature includes a Shropshire woodland.
- The Forestry Commission is undertaking a national study into the value of conifer woodlands for dormice. One study site is in Shropshire.
- Recent survey work in Shropshire has uncovered new sites for dormice: some on common land adjacent to ancient woodlands and some in small woods less than 10 hectares.

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5 Key Habitats

- Ancient coppice woodland with standards
- High forest woodland
- Ancient woodland replanted with conifers
- Hedgerows, scrub and overgrown gardens

6 Complementary Plans

UK Dormouse SAP

Shropshire Hedgerow HAP

Shropshire Semi-Natural Broadleaved Woodland HAP

Shropshire Otter SAP

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7 Action Plan: Dormouse	Meets Objectives	Lead Organisation	Assisting Organisation	By When?
<p>7.1 Policy and Protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that sites important for dormice are designated as cSACs, SSSIs or LNRs, or identified as Wildlife Sites. • Ensure that policies to protect dormice and their habitats are included in local plans. 	<p>A</p> <p>A</p>	<p>EN</p> <p>SCC, LAs</p>	<p>SWT, FC, SCC, LAs,</p> <p>SWT, EN</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
<p>7.2 Land Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the needs of the dormouse in agri-environment schemes where dormice (or suitable habitat) are present. • Encourage landowners to manage their land to support dormice populations. • Enhance at least five sites that currently support dormice through habitat creation and appropriate management. • Select at least one site as a demonstration area to illustrate best practices for dormice conservation. 	<p>A, B</p> <p>A</p> <p>B</p> <p>A</p>	<p>DEFRA</p> <p>FWAG</p> <p>SWT</p> <p>SWT</p>	<p>EN</p> <p>NT, SWT, FC, SCC, SGCT</p> <p>NT, FC</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>2005</p> <p>2005</p>
<p>7.3 Monitoring and Research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to survey hedgerows, scrub and woodlands for dormice, especially in areas with few records. • Establish the value of conifer woodlands and other habitats for supporting dormice. 	<p>A, C</p> <p>C</p>	<p>SWT</p> <p>FC</p>	<p>EN, SCC, CT</p> <p>CT, NT</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish and monitor nest boxes to determine the effectiveness of management techniques and to assess population numbers. 	C	SWT	All	2002
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide data on Shropshire dormice to the national nest box scheme run by Royal Holloway College and funded by English Nature. 	C	CT		Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train individuals so they have licences to check nest boxes. 	C	SWT	CT	Ongoing
7.4 Advisory				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide advice to land managers and advisors on the conservation of dormice. 	A, D	SWT	EN, SCC, CT	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce a leaflet for landowners on dormice, including principles of land management and ecology. 	A, D.	SWT	CT	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase public awareness of the status and needs of dormice. 	D	SWT, EN	All	Ongoing

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KEY TO ORGANISATIONS

CT	Cathy Turtle
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
EN	English Nature
FC	Forestry Commission
FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
LAs	Local Authorities (all levels)
NT	National Trust
SCC	Shropshire County Council
SGCT	Severn Gorge Countryside Trust
SWT	Shropshire Wildlife Trust

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