

UK Biodiversity Action Plan for Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*)

Current status

The dormouse does not occur in Scotland or Northern Ireland. In Wales, there are few known populations and in England it has become extinct in up to 7 counties (comprising half its former range) in the past 100 years. It is absent from the north, except for small populations in Cumbria and Northumberland, and although dormice are still widespread in southern counties (Devon to Kent), they are patchily distributed. Population densities everywhere are less than 10 adults per hectare, even in good habitats.

The dormouse is listed on Appendix 3 of the Bonn Convention and Annex IVa of the EC Habitats Directive. It is protected under Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations, 1994 (Regulation 38) and Schedule 5 of the WCA 1981

Current factors causing loss or decline

Changes in woodland management practice, notably cessation of hazel coppicing and stock incursion into woodland.

Fragmentation of woodland, leaving isolated, non-viable populations. (Short distances, possibly as little as 100m, form absolute barriers to dispersal, unless arboreal routes are available).

Current action

Ecological research has led to practical proposals for conservation management. A nestbox scheme has been established, aimed at collating data on breeding and population density from sites throughout the present range.

A Practical Guide to Dormouse Conservation was published by the Mammal Society in 1989, and EN are preparing a manual of dormouse conservation management.

In 1992 the dormouse was added to English Nature's Species Recovery Programme, with the aim of protecting and consolidating the species at selected sites where it still occurs, and developing methods to re-establish dormice in counties from which they have been lost. Trial re-introductions have been undertaken in Cambridgeshire and Nottinghamshire.

A major public participation exercise - the Great Nut Hunt of 1993 - aroused considerable interest and prompted many local surveys which improved knowledge of dormouse conservation status.

Developments which fragment habitats and break up natural features which link wildlife sites (notably road building) have a significant impact on dormouse populations. The importance of retaining and managing natural features linking wildlife sites was emphasised in DoE's Planning Policy Guidance Note on Nature Conservation (PPG9), published in October 1994, which covers England.

Action plan objectives and targets

Maintain dormouse populations in all the counties where they still occur.

Enhance dormouse populations in all the counties where they still occur.

Re-establish self-sustaining populations in at least 5 counties where they have been lost.

Proposed actions with lead agencies

Policy and legislation

Seek to ensure that PPG9 guidance issued by DoE and the WO is taken into account by Highway Authorities and LAs. (ACTION: DoT, LAs, WO)

Site safeguard and management

Sites supporting dormice should be identified and advice provided to land managers on appropriate management. (ACTION: CCW, EN)

Grant-aid and incentive schemes (such as the Woodland Grant Scheme) should be used to encourage owners to manage suitable habitat sensitively. (ACTION: FA)

Manage woodlands and hedgerows to maintain current populations and prevent further habitat fragmentation. (ACTION: FA, MAFF)

Species management and protection

Continue the programme to re-introduce dormice in 5 counties (Cambridgeshire, Nottinghamshire and 3 others yet to be selected) where they are currently absent. Reinforce populations in at least 3 other counties where they are scattered (e.g.: Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire and Berkshire). (ACTION: EN)

Establish by 1996 a co-ordinated programme of captive breeding to support the re-introduction programme, including research into the long term survival of captive bred individuals. (ACTION: EN)

Advisory

A new manual on dormouse conservation will be published in 1995. (ACTION: EN)

Support training in conservation of dormice both for land managers and advisers. (ACTION: MAFF, FA, WOAD, CCW, EN)

Future Research and Monitoring

Continue research into dormouse ecology, with particular emphasis on the ecology of dormice in hedgerows or conifer sites, the analysis of existing population data, hibernation requirements, and the effects on populations of isolation. (ACTION: EN)

Promote research on methods of conserving dormice which are consistent with various silviculture systems. (ACTION: EN, FA)

The National Dormouse Monitoring Scheme should be maintained and extended to 25 counties. Methods of survey or monitoring should be further developed and standardised to obtain sufficient long-term data on which to assess the effects of site management and successional development. (ACTION: CCW, EN)

Surveys of sites identified in the Great Nut Hunt of 1993 should be repeated at 5-10 year intervals to provide data on changes in distribution and abundance. (ACTION: EN)

Carry out a survey of dormice in Wales to assess the range and habitat use and identify necessary conservation measures. (ACTION: CCW)

Encourage research on the ecology and conservation of this species in an international context. (ACTION: CCW, EN, JNCC)

Pass information gathered during survey and monitoring of this species to JNCC in order that it can be incorporated in a national database and contribute to the maintenance of an up-to-date Red List. (ACTION: CCW, EN)

Communications and Publicity

Ensure that landowners, agencies and local authorities are aware of the requirements of the dormouse, especially the impact woodland and hedgerow management may have, and the effects of habitat fragmentation. (ACTION: CCW, EN)

Ensure continued public awareness of this species as a key indicator of desirable woodland and hedge conditions. (ACTION: CCW, EN, FA, MAFF, WOAD)