

This Species Action Plan sets out to maintain and enlarge dormouse populations on Caravan Club-owned sites, and has been drafted for Club Site Teams and Site Wardens. It provides background information and makes recommendations on sympathetic habitat management. Note that this BAP refers to the native dormouse, not the introduced edible dormouse.

Introduction

An elusive and nocturnal tree-dwelling mammal, often called the 'hazel dormouse' due to its love of hazelnuts. Renowned for sleeping in their ball-shaped nests; dormice have been calculated to spend ¾ of their life asleep! The dormouse is a UK flagship species and important bio-indicator, being particularly sensitive to habitat and population fragmentation.

The Caravan Club audit 2006 revealed that dormice may be present at 61 Club sites

How to recognise this species

- Sandy coloured fur
- Long, thick tail
- Black eyes
- Long whiskers
- Prehensile fore and hind feet (i.e. they can grip, for climbing)
- Nest is a grapefruit-sized ball of woven grass and honeysuckle bark, with an outer shell of leaves. Unlike wren nests, they lack moss or an obvious entrance.



Credit: Elaine Austin

Current status

- Once common and widespread throughout England and Wales, the dormouse is now extinct in many counties. Most surviving populations are in the south of England (particularly Devon, Somerset, Sussex and Kent), parts of Wales and Cumbria
- The species has full protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations 1994, the Bonn Convention and EC Habitats Directive
- Factors causing decline include:
 - Changes in woodland management practices, particularly decline or cessation of coppicing and livestock incursion into woodland
 - Inappropriate woodland and hedge management, leading to isolation/lack of dispersal routes, lack of suitable habitat/food sources, heavy shading and lack of thinning
 - Historic loss of woodland habitat
 - Fragmentation of woodlands
 - Deer damage to coppice re-growth and shrub/understorey layer
 - Squirrel competition for food
 - Loss of tree holes, and suitable nest sites

Ecology/management requirements

Habitat: Woodland, species-rich hedgerow, dense scrub

Hibernation: Dormice hibernate from October to March/April

Nests: Summer nests in tree canopies and/or dense vegetation. Hibernation nest is a similar structure, but located under moss or leaf litter

Food: Hazelnuts particularly important, but also nuts, fruit and berries from trees and shrubs (e.g. oak, wayfaring tree, blackthorn, hawthorn, yew, hazel, ash, sycamore, elder, dogwood, honeysuckle), and pollen and nectar (e.g. hawthorn, sycamore, wayfaring tree, elder, dogwood, honeysuckle, bramble, broom, and sweet chestnut). A variety of species is needed to supply food from April to September

How to look after this species

	Site safeguard and management	Species management and protection
DO'S	<p>DO <u>Manage hedgerows appropriately</u> (fill gaps, trim irregularly outside bird breeding season)</p> <p>DO <u>Trim hedgerows in rotation</u>, so that lengths with fruit/berries/flowers are always available</p> <p>DO <u>Lay new hedgerows</u> if there is space. Look for opportunities to replace fencing with species-rich native hedgerow</p> <p>DO <u>Maintain/increase area of broad-leaved and mixed woodland</u>, where possible</p> <p>DO <u>Coppice woodland</u>, and <u>convert coniferous plantations</u> into broadleaved woodland</p> <p>DO <u>Apply for grant aid</u> to assist management (e.g. Woodland Grant Scheme)</p>	<p>DO <u>Maintain/improve hedgerow, woodland and scrub connectivity</u> – this is critical because dormice very rarely descend to the ground. <u>Rope bridges</u> can be used to link isolated areas</p> <p>DO Plant/replant hedgerow using a <u>variety of the native, fruit, berry and nut-bearing species listed above</u>, of local provenance (follow the <i>Flora Locale</i> code).</p> <p>DO <u>Maintain/improve hazel abundance</u> on site. Hazelnuts are a particularly important food</p> <p>DO <u>Monitor dormouse presence/absence</u> by examining gnawed hazelnuts (the opening of nuts eaten by dormouse has a smooth edge)</p> <p>DO <u>Provide dormouse nest-boxes</u> in woodland and dense vegetation adjacent to woodland</p>
DON'TS	<p>DON'T <u>Cut/trim all hedgerows on site in any given year; uncut lengths will help to provide natural food sources</u></p> <p>DON'T <u>Remove tree canopy or hedgerow connectivity</u> during any management</p>	<p>DON'T <u>Provide bird nest-boxes for dormice</u> – their temperature range is often unsuitable</p> <p>DON'T <u>Disturb dormice, nests or nest-boxes</u>. A licence is required from the relevant authority (NE or CCW) to inspect nest boxes</p> <p>DON'T <u>Be discouraged if you don't see any</u>. Dormouse are nocturnal, very elusive, and live at low population densities (up to 10/ha)</p>

For further information on this species visit:

The Caravan Club Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for dormouse: <http://www.caravanclub.co.uk>

UK BAP for dormouse: <http://www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=462>