



Bedfordshire and Luton Species Action Plan: Hazel Dormouse

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Hazel dormouse, *Muscardinus avellanarius*
Photo by Björn Schulz



*Bedfordshire
Dormouse Group*



Hazel dormouse
Muscardinus avellanarius

National lead organisation(s):
English Nature, Wildlife Trusts

County lead organisation(s):
Bedfordshire Dormouse Group

The hazel dormouse can be easily recognised by its small size, bright golden-brown fur, large eyes and bushy tail. Closely associated with ancient semi-natural woodlands, scrub and ancient hedges this nocturnal species has specialised habitat requirements.

Current status

National status

Hazel dormice can be found in lowland England and Wales but are absent from Scotland and Northern Ireland. Dormice occur mainly in the southern counties where they are still widespread but patchily distributed. Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Sussex and Kent in particular are main strongholds for this species. There are few recorded localities north of the Midlands, although dormice are present in small numbers in Cumbria and Northumberland.

Hazel dormice can be found in Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire and have been introduced into sites in Cambridgeshire and Buckinghamshire.

Local status

Historically thought to have been more abundant in Bedfordshire the hazel dormouse can now be found in the parishes of Studham and Whipsnade and at Streatley in areas of ancient wood and hedgerow on the clay with flints and with scrub on the chalk. Whilst the presence of the dormice can be confirmed their population dynamics are not known. In 2001 hazel dormice were re-introduced to Maulden Wood in mid-Bedfordshire as part of the national Species Recovery Programme.

Current factors affecting the hazel dormouse

- Reduction in the amount and fragmentation of ancient semi-natural woodland, leading to the loss of essential woodland features leaving isolated and non viable populations more vulnerable to external factors such as climate
- Changes in woodland management reducing the number of suitable sites for dormice. The decline of coppice management will have reduced food availability, structural and habitat diversity within woods





- Hedgerow loss and inappropriate management has reduced dormouse habitat and food availability, isolating and fragmenting populations
- Insufficient knowledge of the distribution, behaviour and habitat requirements of dormice
- Climate, seasonal variations have an impact on breeding success and survival rates especially over winter

Current action

Legal

The hazel dormouse is protected under Annex IVa of the EC Habitats Directive, Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations 1994. The Act and Regulations make it illegal to:

- i. Intentionally or deliberately kill, injure or capture dormice
- ii. Deliberately disturb dormice (whether in nest or not)
- iii. Intentionally or recklessly damage or destroy dormouse breeding sites or resting places
- iv. Possess or transport a dormouse or any part of a dormouse, unless acquired legally
- v. Sell, barter or exchange dormice, or parts of dormice

A licence must be obtained from English Nature to undertake any work involving dormice.

The hazel dormouse is also listed under Appendix 3 of the Bonn Convention. In addition Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS 9): Biodiversity and Geological Conservation, with its accompanying legal circular and good practice guidelines, states that the presence of a protected species, such as the hazel dormouse, is a material consideration in assessing development proposals.

Management, research and guidance

The hazel dormouse has been identified as a Key Species in the English Nature Species Recovery Programme. The aims of the Recovery Programme are to maintain and enhance dormouse populations where they still occur by site safeguards and implementation of appropriate woodland management, and to reintroduce the dormouse (under controlled conditions) into at least five counties from which they have been lost.

Ecological research has led to practical proposals for conservation management. The second edition of *The Dormouse Conservation Handbook* was published in 2006 by English Nature. The National Dormouse Monitoring Programme collates data on breeding success from sites throughout the species' present range.

The Bedfordshire Dormouse Group is an affiliated group of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and includes members of a variety of local conservation organisations and interested individuals. It works to protect, further our knowledge and raise public awareness of dormice. National and local research is used by the Group to help develop appropriate management advice for their habitat.





As part of the National Great Nut Hunt carried out in 1997, the Group undertook a nut hunt in Studham and subsequently nestboxes were erected where positive signs of dormice were found. The Dormouse Group now has over 800 nestboxes erected at various sites, mainly in the south around Pegsdon, Studham, Whipsnade and Barton but also in a number of ancient woodlands on the claylands in the centre and north of the county.

Action plan objectives and targets

Objective

Maintain and expand the range and population of the hazel dormouse in Bedfordshire

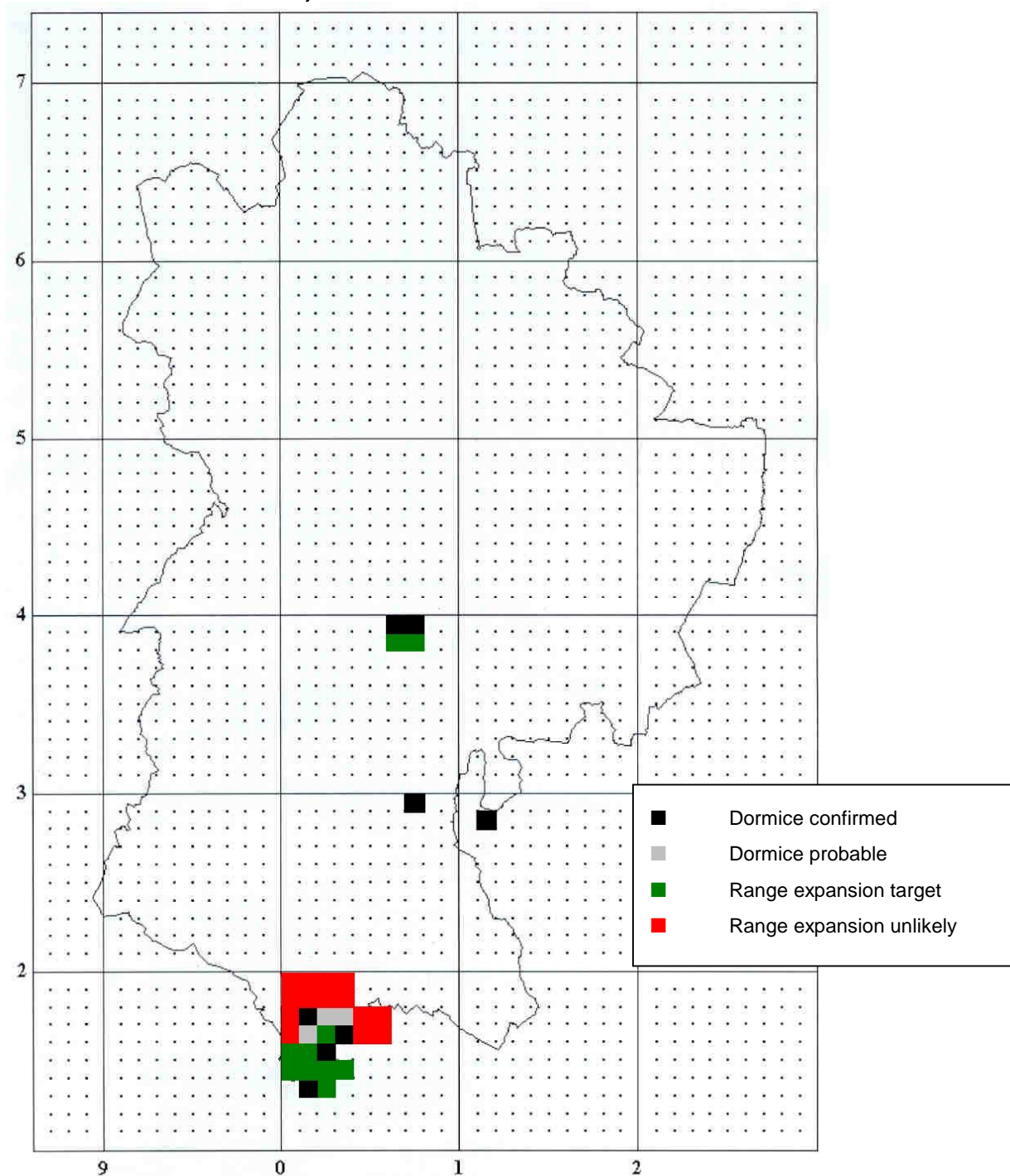
Targets

- A. Maintain the 2005 range of dormice in 8 occupied one-kilometre grid squares (Fig. 1)
- B. Expand by 2010 the Bedfordshire range of dormice from 8 to 18 one-kilometre grid squares (Fig. 1)
- C. Increase by 2010 the Bedfordshire dormouse population index to 115% of the 2005 level





Fig. 1 Current and anticipated range of the Hazel dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) in Bedfordshire



Proposed action

Abbreviations

BDG	Bedfordshire Dormouse Group	GST	The Greensand Trust
BLWWG	Bedfordshire & Luton Wildlife Working Group	NCT	The North Chilterns Trust
NE	Natural England	WT	The Wildlife Trust

Action	Implemented by
Policy and legislation	
1. By 2007 inform local authorities and other relevant organisations of their statutory obligations concerning dormice.	
Site safeguard and management	
2. Manage sympathetically with dormice in mind, hedgerows and woodlands known to support or be close to dormouse populations.	
3. Where dormice are known to be present, link habitats with other actual or suitable dormouse sites to facilitate range expansion.	
Species management and protection	
4. Continue the programme of training for the handling of dormice	BDG
5. Continue the programme of annual next box checks between May and October	BDG
Advisory	
6. By 2008 inform landowners throughout the existing and anticipated dormouse range, how to manage their hedgerows and woodlands sympathetically for dormice.	
7. Disseminate to local authorities, landowners/managers and organisations providing countryside management advice, advice on dormouse conservation and any new relevant information on habitat management and ecology.	



Future research and monitoring

8. Where appropriate, continue to send data to the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme.	
9. Locate by 2010 five new sites suitable for the erection of dormouse boxes, targeting sites that contain suitable habitat and those adjacent to confirmed dormouse populations.	
10. Increase by 2010 the number of sites that contribute to the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme from two to four.	
11. By 2010 undertake hedgerow surveys in and around Maulden, Studham, Sharpenhoe, Smithcombe, Sundon Hills and Hoo Bit and other suitable locations to identify the need for habitat creation and restoration.	

Communication and publicity

12. Liaise with neighbouring dormouse groups and other organisations to co-ordinate joint actions and events.	
13. Liaise with the Species Recovery Programme regarding the possibility of further dormouse introductions in the county.	





Monitoring the Action Plan

The Bedfordshire Dormouse Group will review this action plan on an annual basis.

Complementary plans

There is an UK national action plan for the dormouse by the UK Biodiversity Steering Group. Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Hertfordshire have also written action plans for the dormouse.

This action plan should be read alongside the habitat action plans written for Farmland and Woodland habitats in Bedfordshire and Luton.

Acknowledgements

The Bedfordshire Dormouse Group has written this species action plan. Further information about the Group is available by contacting The Wildlife Trust Tel 01234 364213.

References

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