



Working Around Dormice

Information for Planners
and Practitioners



The Hazel Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*)

The hazel dormouse is one of our most elusive native mammals. It is a European protected species, a National Priority species and, although rare and declining, it is still found in Bedfordshire. This information sheet aims to provide guidance on where dormice are found in the county, the level of protection awarded to them and what you should do if you think they might be a present at a site you are involved with.

The hazel dormouse should not be confused with the larger edible dormouse (*Glis glis*); an introduced species whose distribution is centred on Hertfordshire but is occasionally found in the very south of Bedfordshire.



Photo Credits

Dormouse on branch (inset above) courtesy of Björn Schulz.

Sleeping Dormouse (background and front cover) courtesy of The Forestry Commission.



Background

The hazel dormouse is a small, nocturnal mammal of woodlands, hedgerows and scrub with bright golden-brown fur, large eyes and a bushy tail. It has been lost from over half its range in England and Wales over the last century. The reasons for this decline are habitat loss, deterioration and fragmentation.

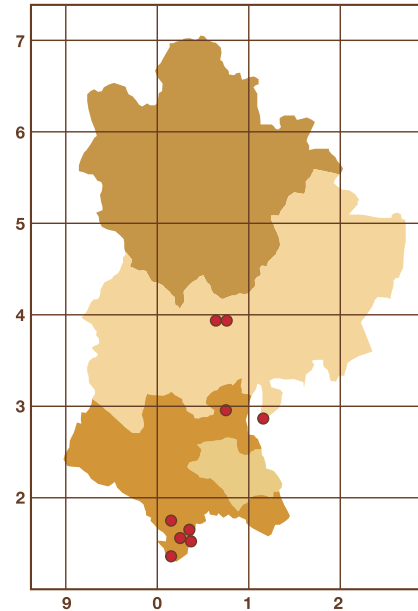
Dormice are arboreal, living and feeding in the branches of trees and shrubs. They breed in late summer, constructing round woven nests, often of strips of honeysuckle bark, in thick vegetation or tree holes. In late autumn they build a nest on or under the ground and remain there in hibernation until the following spring. Good dormouse habitat has a wide diversity of trees and shrubs with good connectivity; sympathetic management to promote this can be very beneficial.

In Bedfordshire populations are now seriously fragmented and dormice are thought to be found only in three main areas – Studham/Whipsnade, Pegsdon/Sharpenhoe and Maulden. The species was re-introduced to Maulden Wood in 2001 as part of English Nature's Species Recovery Programme.

Photo Credits

Dormouse in hand and forest (inset right)
courtesy of The Forestry Commission.

Brambles (left) courtesy of Tom Goskar/tomgoskar.com.



Distribution of hazel dormice in Bedfordshire

Map prepared by the Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Recording & Monitoring Centre using data supplied by the Bedfordshire Dormouse Group, part of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society.





Photo Credits
Nut shells (background) and nest (right)
courtesy of Ian White.

Status

The hazel dormouse enjoys the maximum level of statutory protection offered to species in the UK as it is listed on Appendix 3 of the Bonn Convention and Annex IVa of the EC Habitats Directive. It is also protected under Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations 1994 (as amended) and Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

In practice this means it is unlawful to:

- deliberately kill, injure, capture or disturb a hazel dormouse.
- damage or destroy its breeding site or resting place, whether the action is deliberate or accidental.

It is generally felt that as dormouse breeding and hibernating sites are difficult to locate, the most pragmatic approach is to treat dormouse habitat as protected. In many cases, following good practice guidelines on methods and timing of work can reduce the chance of committing an offence. However, if this is not possible, a licence will be needed from Natural England and mitigation may be necessary. A licence can only be granted if there is no satisfactory alternative or if the proposed activity will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population at a favourable conservation status.

This level of protection also means that:

- local authorities have a duty to safeguard dormice and their habitat when developing strategic plans and determining planning applications. In addition to protecting existing populations, this could include positive work to strengthen habitat links between dormouse areas.
- the presence of dormice in a hedgerow ensures that the hedgerow is classified as an 'important hedgerow' for the purpose of the Hedgerow Regulations 1997.

What to do if you think an operation/planning application might affect dormice

- The map overleaf gives a broad indication of the areas in Bedfordshire where hazel dormice have been recorded in recent years, however, it may be possible that dormice are still present in other areas of suitable habitat in the county. More detailed information is held by the Bedfordshire Dormouse Group and can be obtained from the Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Recording & Monitoring Centre.
- Operations which may be detrimental to dormice:
 1. Developments causing loss of woodland/hedgerows/scrub – either areas used by populations of dormice or the breaking of habitat links between such areas.
 2. Woodland/hedgerow/scrub management operations in areas where dormice are present.
- Advice as to whether the operation/application may have implications for dormice can be obtained from your local authority's ecological advisor, the Wildlife Trust or Natural England. If necessary, they will also be able to advise you on how you need to proceed in terms of timing of work, further survey work or licences.



Photo Credits

Bedfordshire hedgerow (inset below left) courtesy of Heather Webb.
Unripe Hazel (inset below right) courtesy of Roger Whitehead.



Useful contacts

Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Recording & Monitoring Centre

c/o The Wildlife Trust
Priory Country Park Visitor Centre
Barkers Lane
Bedford MK41 9SH
Tel: 01234 355435

County Ecologist

Bedfordshire County Council
County Hall
Cauldwell Street
Bedford MK42 9AP
Tel: 01234 228066

The Wildlife Trust

Priory Country Park Visitor Centre
Barkers Lane
Bedford MK41 9SH
Tel: 01234 364213

Four Counties Team

Natural England
Ham Lane House
Ham Lane
Peterborough PE2 5UR
Tel: 01733 405850

Further information

**Up-to-date guidance on European protected
species can be found on the following websites:**

www.naturalengland.org.uk
www.forestry.gsi.gov.uk

The Dormouse Conservation Handbook (2nd edition)

Paul Bright, Pat Morris & Tony Mitchell-Jones, 2006.
www.naturalengland.org.uk

Bedfordshire & Luton Species Action Plan: Hazel Dormouse (updated Nov 2006)

www.bedslife.org.uk

