

DORMOUSE REPORT 2003

BNHS Journal

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The Bedfordshire Dormouse Group is a collection of people interested in the study and conservation of Dormice in Bedfordshire. The group is open and free to all people. Although the Group is affiliated to the BNHS, membership of the BNHS is not a requirement. New members or visitors are always welcome and during 2003 a considerable number of people have been shown Dormice at close quarters. The group can always use more people to help with box checking and people will be given training where necessary towards a handling licence, as dormice are a protected species and can not be handled without the correct licence. The Dormouse Group is very grateful for the support of the BNHS and that received from the Wildlife Trust, the County Council, the Greensand Trust and the other supporters and landowners.

The main action of the Dormouse Group is the checking once a month, from May to October, of special Dormouse nest boxes. These are at 27 different sites across the County. In 2003 the Group had 857 boxes and 75 tubes to check, an increase in number from the previous year. However, only 18 Dormice were seen and 23 boxes used. This is lower than 2002 and is largely due to the low numbers of animals found at Studham. The weather during the summer of 2003 was both hot and dry and this could have been the cause of the change in numbers. Due to the hot weather, were the Dormice living away from the boxes, or was it due to a food shortage? The fruit and insect populations seemed to be adequate. Box checkers reported a higher than usual level of dead bird chicks in the boxes in the early part of the season.

Dormice were known at only three sites within Bedfordshire during 2003 compared to 5 sites in 2002. At one Studham site no animals were seen, compared to four animals in 2002. The results from the three active sites are as follows: -

Dedmansey Wood, Studham.

Due to the difficulty of confirming that animals seen on subsequent visits are the same or different from the animals seen previously, this site produced confirmed results of six adults and four young, but a total of 14 animals were found in boxes during the year. Dedmansey Wood was the only site in the county this year with proven breeding. A most unusual occurrence was finding a hibernating Dormouse in one of the boxes during February, as Dormice usually hibernate underground. During one of the summer checks, a Long-eared Bat was found in one of the boxes. The winter hibernation block was again not used. The adjacent Forestry Commission conifer block, which contains 50 boxes, produced no results for 2003, compared to one Dormouse being found during 2002. This shows the importance of the correct habitat type for the year round survival of Dormice.

Hoo Bit, Pegsdon

Only one Dormouse was seen at this site all summer, compared to five Dormice in 2002. However three boxes did contain Dormouse nests. Although a poor result, at least the Dormice are known to be still present!

Maulden Wood, Clophill

This wood was the site of a re-introduction programme in 2001 and now has 239 boxes and tubes to monitor on a monthly basis. 13 Dormice were seen during the summer, but only seven can be confirmed as different animals. Eight boxes and one tube were used. Dormouse tubes are a new cheap nest device, made from a small size tree guard, so it was interesting to find a torpid Dormouse in its nest in one of the tubes. 39 tubes were put on site in 2002 and this is the first use of any of them. The tubes are located 200 metres from the area of the release site, so we know the Dormice are colonising new areas of the wood. During the last check of the year in October a freshly dead Dormouse was found in a box, which was partly eaten by the larvae of the Brown House Moth (*Hofmannophila pseudospretella*). It is not known if the Dormouse was dead before the larvae started eating it, or if the larvae were the cause of death. The moth larvae almost certainly came from a bird's nest previously in the box.

There is a general rule that Dormice need to be 15gms. or more in October to survive winter hibernation. In May 2003 a female Dormouse was found in a box and weighed only 14 gms. In the next box two female Dormice were present that weighed 16 and 19gms. In October of 2002 two female Dormice were in the same box and again weighed 16 and 19 gms. By comparison during October 2003 Dormice were weighed at a maximum of 29gms for a male and 24 gms for a female. The winter hibernation block was checked, but no sign of its use could be found.

The contiguous sites of Smithcombe through to Sundon Hills have been the subject of special study during the year to manage the area as one site for Dormice. A habitat survey has been started and the boxes moved to better locations. Management suggestions have been made to ensure connectivity of suitable Dormouse habitat along the whole site. This programme will continue in 2004 with more boxes and surveys.

To try to better understand Dormouse requirements, a start has been made on habitat studies at all the box sites. Again this will continue in 2004, together with recording plant species used to produce nests. Apart from the abundant use of the Dormouse boxes by Blue and Great Tits, other species using the boxes were Wood Mice, a Common Shrew, Long-eared Bats and unwelcome Hornets!

The Dormouse Group was much saddened by the news during the year of the death of John Niles, one of our box checkers in the north of the county. He will be much missed.

The overall results for the year were down compared to 2002. We will have to wait to see if this is real or just the vagaries of box checking.

I would like to thank all the box checkers and helpers for the time and hard work they put in to gathering all this data on our Dormice.

Dormouse Box Sites - 2003

Site No.	Wood	Parish	Checker	No. of Boxes	A	Y	U	Other records	Date Fitted
1*	Dedmansey Wood	Studham	C. Tack (L)	46	6	4	11	14seen. 1 Hib. Dor.Leb	1996
2*	Zoo Fence	Whipsnade	C. Tack (L)	30	0	0	0		1996
3	C	Studham	C. Tack (L)	6	-	-	-		1996
4*	Bury Farm	Studham	C. Tack (L)	42	0	0	0		1996
5	Ashen Grove	Studham	C. Tack (L)	0	-	-	-	1996 - 1999	
6	West Wood	Souldrop	J. Comont	13	-	-	-		1997
7*	Hoo Bit	Pegsdon	S. Halton (L)	32	1	0	3		1997
8	Icknield Way	Pegsdon	S. Halton (L)	26	0	0	0		1998
				[20] Tubes	-	-	-		
9	Leet Wood	Barton	A. Proud (L)	0	-	-	-	1997--	
10	C	Odell	M. McCarrick (L)	35	0	0	0	B-H- 5xLeb	2000
11	Clappers	Sharpenhoe	S. Halton (L)	35	0	0	0		1997
12	Kings Wood	Heath & Reach	P. Irving	30	-	-	-		1997
13	Louse Acre	Sharnbrook	M. McCarrick (L)	0	-	-	-		
14	Coppice Wood	Melchbourne	M. McCarrick (L)	0	-	-	-	-2001	
15*	Smithcombe	Barton	A. Proud (L)	28	0	0	0	B	2003
				36 tubes	0	0	0		2003
16	Heath	Whipsnade	S. Halton (L)	15	0	0	0		1998
17	Marston Thrift Wood	M. Moretaine	A. Bucknall	30	0	0	0		
18*	Maulden Wood	Clophill	S. Raven (L)	200	6	0	8	13seen. B,H,2Wm,2Leb	2001
				39 Tubes	1	0	1		2002
19	Apsley Bury	Shillington	G. Bellamy (L)	10	0	0	0	Wm. B H	2002
20	Abbey Park	Turvey		30	0	0	0		2001
21*	Hudnall Corner	Hudnall	D. Otter	0	-	-	-	2000 - 2002	
22	C	Studham	C. Tack (L)	8	0	0	0		2000
23	Bury	Shillington	G. Bellamy (L)	10	0	0	0	Wm. B	1999
24	Colworth Thicket	Sharnbrook	M. McCarrick (L)	29	0	0	0	B-H	2001
25	Skimpot Caravan S.	Luton	M. McCarrick (L)	4	0	0	0	B	2000
26*	Oldhill Wood	Studham	J. Howell	6	0	0	0	B	2003
27	Palmer Wood	Old Warden	J. Adams (L)	29	0	0	0	B-Cs	2001
28*	C	Studham	C. Tack (L)	45	0	0	0		2000
29	C	Studham	C. Tack (L)	15	0	0	0		2000
30	Church Farm	Whipsnade	C. Tack (L)	25	0	0	0		2002
31	Kings Wood	H. Conquest	R. Lawrence (L)	28	0	0	0	Wm.	2002
32	Stockgrove Park	Heath & Reach	R. Woolnough	[30]	-	-	-		
33*	Dedmansey Wood	Studham	Forestry Comm.	50	0	0	0		2001
				(5) tubes	-	-	-		

Total:- 857 Boxes and 75 Tubes

* = Known used by Dormice

A = Adults

Y = Young

U = Used (number of boxes used)

O = Other use (bird/mouse)

N = 50+ Box National Survey site

(L) = Licence Holder

C = Site location confidential

Wm = Wood mouse

Cs = Common shrew

Ps = Pygmy shrew

G = Glis

B = Bird

H = Hornet

[] = Boxes not yet erected on site

Leb = Long-eared bat

Pip = Pipistrelle bat

Total Boxes = 857

Total Tubes = 75

Total Dormice = 18

Boxes/Tubes Used = 23