

## DORMOUSE REPORT FOR 2004

For those of you not familiar with The Bedfordshire Dormouse Group let me explain that it is a collection of people interested in the study and conservation of Dormice in Bedfordshire. The members come from a variety of sources such as the BNHS, the Wildlife Trust, The Greensand Trust, the County Council and independent people. Membership of any of these organisations is not a pre-requisite of being in the Dormouse Group. The Group is open free to anyone interested in joining and new members or visitors are always welcome. The Dormouse Group would like to thank the BNHS for its considerable support of the Group during 2004, as well as the landowners of the box sites.

The main action of the Dormouse Group is to support the Bedfordshire Dormouse Species Action Plan. This requires the Group to establish the distribution of Dormice within Bedfordshire. One way of achieving this is to erect special Dormouse boxes in suitable woodlands across the county and then check them for signs of Dormouse use. If possible this is done once a month from May to October. In 2004 the Group had 845 boxes and 155 tubes to check; an increase in numbers from the previous year. These were at 28 different sites. However, at this time I can only report that 11 Dormice were seen and 6 boxes used, considerable less than in 2003, but the full results are not yet available. To handle Dormouse requires a licence issued by English Nature and nine members of the Group hold such licences, while another ten people are in training for this licence.

Dormice are known so far at four sites within Bedfordshire during 2004, the same number of sites as in 2003. The results from the four active sites are as follows:

### Hoo Bit, Pegsdon

One Dormouse was seen in the same box during the May check when it was very active and again during the June check when it was asleep, but at a time of cold and wet weather. No sign of this Dormouse could be found at two later checks.

### Smithcombe, Barton.

A site that has recorded Dormice in the past, but in 2004 although no Dormice were seen, a definite Dormouse eaten hazel nut was found during a winter survey. This site together with the close by sites of Sundon Hills, Moleskin and Sharpenhoe Clappers is now under one management plan, with the aim of improving the habitat for Dormice.

### Maulden Wood, Clophill

This wood was the site of a re-introduction programme in 2001 and in 2004 had 235 boxes and tubes to monitor the population size and range. There is a real problem in quantifying the number of different animals seen during the year, but a minimum of two different adults and eight different young were seen during the year. The best single box check in October recorded four adults and four young. During the whole summer season six adults and 12 young were seen, allowing many people to see a Dormouse for the first time. All these Dormice were in 11 different boxes. During 2004 none of the tubes were found to hold Dormice. Again the underground hibernation cave was not seen to be used.

### East Common, Studham.

This is a new site that looked to have suitable habitat during a survey in 2003. In March 2004 eight boxes were put up on site and in October a Dormouse nest was found in one box that had not been there during the September check. So far no actual Dormice have been seen.

### Comments.

Apart from the abundant use of the Dormouse boxes by Blue and Great Tits, Wrens and a single Marsh Tit, other species using the boxes were Wood Mice, a Common Shrew, Long-eared Bats and the much unwanted Hornets. All records of the Dormice as well as the other mammals will be passed on to the BNHS Mammal Recorder, the Bedfordshire Record Centre and the National Dormouse Project.

The 2005 season will soon be starting and any interested people are welcome. We have a planning meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> April at 7.30pm at Haynes Church Hall. The Maulden Wood box checks are on the third Saturday of each month from May to October at 10.0am at the Greensand Trust office. Bring lunch if you plan to stay to the afternoon and a call to Sue Raven would be appreciated. The first meeting is on the 21<sup>st</sup> May, but Dormice are not guaranteed !

I particularly wish to thank the hard working box checkers and supports.

David Anderson. Chairman- Bedfordshire Dormouse Group.  
21<sup>st</sup> March 2004.