

M-A1 HAZEL DORMOUSE *MUSCARDINUS AVELLANARIUS* SPECIES ACTION PLAN

1. Introduction

In Monmouthshire there is an important population of the hazel dormouse, which is of high biodiversity conservation importance in the county and a UK priority species.

Dormice are one of the most attractive of British mammals, but being nocturnal, they are rarely seen. It is only when observers are checking nest-boxes that a dormouse is likely to be seen. Fortunately they leave clear signs of their presence in an area, notably gnawed hazelnuts with a smooth inner edge to the neat round hole. Other mammals that eat hazelnuts either split the nuts (grey squirrel) or leave characteristic marks from their incisor teeth around the hole (voles and wood mice). Dormice have thick bushy tails, which distinguish them from true mice, as also does the hairy inside to the ears. The adults have rich golden-brown fur and large dark eyes and the head and body length is 6-9 cm with the tail measuring a further 6-7 cm.

Dormice feed on fruit, flowers, pollen, nuts and insects such as aphids. They need woodland with a good diversity of trees and shrubs to provide an all year round food supply. Brambles are a particularly important source of fruits in the autumn whilst acorns and hazelnuts are vital to help the animals increase their body weight before hibernation. Dormice rarely come down to the ground except to hibernate, so need to be able to move about within woodlands through trees and bushes or move between woodlands using tall hedgerows. They spend the day asleep in spherical nests of shredded bark of honeysuckle or clematis, constructed in trees, bushes or bramble patches up to 5m from the ground. They also readily use nest-boxes erected on trees for birds or for small mammals. However, during the winter they hibernate in nests on or below the woodland floor. Hibernation lasts until about April or May and breeding takes place during the summer with an average female dormouse rearing one or two litters a year, each usually of about 4 young. When litters are born late the young are unlikely to survive because they do not have time to build up fat reserves before the onset of the winter. Weather conditions play a crucial role in determining when dormice breed and whether young will survive. There has been concern that recent warmer winters may be causing them to come out of hibernation too early, and not find food to sustain them. Declines in the northern parts of their range have been attributed to this.

2. Current status

Dormice are considered a high priority species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and receive protection through the EC Habitats Directive (Annex 1Va), the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (Schedule 5), the Bonn Convention 1979

(Appendix 111) and Schedule 2 of the Conservation Regulations 1994 and more recently the Countryside Rights of Way (CROW) act (Section 74). The Acts and Regulations make it an offence to: (1) intentionally capture, kill or injure a dormouse; (2) deliberately disturb a dormouse or damage or destroy a dormouse breeding site or resting place; (3) possess or transport a dormouse or any part of a dormouse; (4) sell, barter or exchange dormice or parts of dormice.

The importance of this species is recognised by the national action plan and by local action plans prepared by local authorities in neighbouring counties to Monmouthshire (e.g. Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire County Councils and Torfaen, Newport and Caerphilly County Borough Councils).

Dormice occur in central and southern Europe and in southern Scandinavia. In Britain they occur only in southern areas although there are small populations in Cumbria and Northumberland. They are absent from Scotland and Northern Ireland. There has been a significant decline in numbers of this species throughout Britain in recent years with dormice becoming extinct in seven counties and more patchily distributed elsewhere.

In Wales, dormice occur in low numbers. In the south they range from the Neath Valley across to the Wye Valley. Four core areas for dormice in Wales were identified in surveys by the Mammal Society from 1975-79 and in surveys by the Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT) from 1997-2000. Central /eastern Monmouthshire was one of these important core areas, others being east Montgomeryshire, south east Radnor/east Brecon and Carmarthen/West Glamorgan. Throughout Wales the VWT found dormice to be present in 53 ten-kilometre squares whilst additional records showed them to be also present in a further 15 squares. Population densities everywhere are less than 10 adults per hectare, even in good habitats.

As throughout Britain, the dormouse in Monmouthshire is widely scattered and occurs at a low density. The Wye Valley and Trellech plateau in the east of the county and woodland in the Usk Valley are particularly important areas. There does appear to be a population in the area of the M4 corridor and valleys to the north of this where suitable habitat occurs. Woodlands with a high proportion of hazel are most frequently found to support dormice, but they may occur where hazel is sparse or absent.

3. Associated habitats

The dormouse usually inhabits deciduous woodlands with a well-developed shrub layer and overgrown hedgerows. It is an agile climber using stems and branches as pathways. There are also recent records from coniferous woodlands, so the requirements of this species should be considered in all woodland and forestry action plans in Monmouthshire.

4. Associated species

The dormouse's woodland habitat is shared by a number of small mammals and woodland birds. Woodlands managed by coppice regime for dormice are also suitable for ancient woodland plants. As well as being valuable habitat components for dormice, hedgerows also support other small mammals and are important for bats. Shrubs and brambles in hedges provide nectar for insects, including many butterflies. The hedgerow cover provides nest sites for many birds, whilst fruits such as brambles, hips and haws are important foods.

5. Current factors affecting the species

- 5.1. Changes in woodland management practice can have detrimental effects, notably cessation of hazel coppicing and the introduction of stock grazing. An increase in deer and grey squirrel numbers also adversely affects tree and shrub regeneration and coppice re-growth. Livestock and deer browsing have resulted in an impoverished understorey and ground flora in some woods. Trampling by livestock may also cause damage to winter nests.
- 5.2. Fragmentation of woodland can make isolated populations of dormice, (which may be small) unviable. Dormice are unwilling to move even short distances, possibly as little as 100m, over open ground. Such open areas act as barriers and corridors of trees or bushes between sites are essential to allow dispersal and mixing of populations.
- 5.3. Inappropriate hedgerow management, such as mechanical flailing of hedges and cutting of brambles in the autumn removes important fruits, seeds and nuts and can destroy nests. Replacement of wooden gates with metal ones also limits the movement of dormice, as they appear to be reluctant to cross metal.
- 5.4. Destruction of semi-natural woodland and re-planting with conifers or other crops can make woodlands unsuitable to maintain viable dormice colonies.
- 5.5. Climatic changes such as the increasing shift to cool wet summers can dramatically lower the survival rates of newborn dormice. The trend towards an unpredictable or unfavourable climate may reduce dormouse survival and breeding success.

6. Current Action

- 6.1. National and local surveys have been undertaken to assess distribution and population size. (1993-1994 and 2001 Great Nut Hunt organised by the, Mammal Society and the 1997-2000 VWT survey) Sites where dormice are present are being identified as SINC's (GWT).
- 6.2. Some woodlands where dormice are present, are now being managed by re-instating rotational coppicing of hazel, as in Croes Robert Wood near Trellech, a GWT reserve. The coppiced material is converted to charcoal and brings some income to the Trust.

- 6.3. In other areas where dormice are present, as around GWT land at Penallt, hedgerows have been thickened and extended by the planting of hazel and a diversity of other shrubs and trees. Alterations to hedgerow management regimes have also been adopted by GWT to present a mosaic of hedgerow habitat.
- 6.4. Nest-boxes for dormice have been erected in some GWT woods and along well-grown hedgerows to provide secure roost and nest sites. These are regularly monitored and GWT are researching a new cheaper style of dormouse box provided by the Mammal Society to map populations through their reserves. Dormouse boxes will have been erected in some MCC woods in the south of the country.
- 6.5. Schemes such as Tir Gofal and the former Hedgerow Renovation Scheme encourage positive management for the dormouse through the maintenance and renovation of hedgerows.
- 6.6. The Hedgerow Regulations 1997 protect countryside hedgerows that may be important for the dormouse.
- 6.7. FC grants (e.g. the Woodland Grant Scheme) encourage new planting of broad-leaved trees and management of existing woodlands.
- 6.8. GWT has instigated a programme of volunteer training in dormouse surveying to build up knowledge of the species distribution throughout Monmouthshire and surrounding areas.
- 6.9. MCC has provided biodiversity grants to landowners for habitat management for the dormouse.

7. Action plan objectives and proposed targets

7.1. UK objectives and targets

- 7.1.1 Maintain dormouse populations in all counties where they still occur.
- 7.1.2 Enhance dormouse populations in all counties where they still occur.
- 7.1.3 Re-establish self-sustaining populations in at least five counties where they have been lost.

7.2. Greater Gwent objectives and targets

No BAP has yet been prepared at the Greater Gwent level.

7.3. Monmouthshire objectives and proposed targets

- 1 Establish distribution and status of dormice in Monmouthshire.
- 2 Maintain and enhance the dormouse population in Monmouthshire.
- 3 Enhance breeding success of dormouse in Monmouthshire.
- 4 Expanding the area of suitable habitat for dormouse.
- 5 Link isolated populations of dormouse in Monmouthshire.
- 6 Initiate habitat management meeting the requirements for dormouse.

8. Proposed actions and key partners for dormouse

Action	Key Partners		Timescale	Meets Target
	Lead	Partners		
1. Policy and legislation				
1.1 Ensure Policies and Strategies do not adversely affect existing populations.	MCC, FCW	CCW, NAWAD	Ongoing Projects	2
1.2 Consider the requirements of dormice when reviewing agri-environment schemes (Tir Gofal) and Woodland Grant Schemes / Woodland Improvement Grants.	CCW, FCW, NAWAD	MCC	Ongoing Projects	2
				3
				4
				5
1.3 Seek to designate important breeding sites as SSSI, SINC or LNR.	CCW, MCC	VWT, GWT	Ongoing	2 3
2. Site safeguard and management				
2.1 Appropriate management advice should be given to landowners and managers of sites identified as supporting dormice.	CCW	MCC Coed Cymru, FCW, VWT, MS, landowners	Ongoing Projects	2
				6
2.2 Licences must be granted prior to management of any known dormouse habitat, with an agreed methodology on how to minimise impact on the species.	CCW		Ongoing Projects	2 6
2.3 Grant aid and incentive schemes such as WGS, Coed Cymru and Tir Gofal should be used to encourage owners to manage	CCW	MCC Coed Cymru, NAWAD,	Ongoing Projects	2
				3
				4
				5

suitable habitats sensitively.		FCW		6
2.3 Manage woodlands and hedgerows to maintain current populations and prevent further habitat fragmentation.	FCW, MCC	GWT, VWT Coed Cymru landowners	Ongoing	2 3 4 5 6
2.4 Ensure dormice are fully considered when assessing any development, which may impact upon the species, paying particular attention to its protection under UK and European legislation.	MCC	CCW, MCS, Dev Plans, Dev control	Ongoing	2
2.5 Ensure opportunities for appropriate mitigation during development are used when avoidance is not an option.	MCC	MCS, Dev Plans, Dev control	Ongoing	2 3 4 5 6
2.6 Ensure opportunities for enhancing habitat for dormice are used during the planning process.	MCC	MCS, Dev Plans, Dev Control	Ongoing	2 3 4 5 6
2.7 Ensure dormice are fully considered during any woodland/forestry management, which may affect the species.	FCW	Coed Cymru, NAWAD, CCW	Projects Ongoing	2
2.8 Ensure European and UK dormouse legislation is applied when assessing any hedgerow removal notice which may affect the species.	MCC	CCW	Ongoing	2
3. Species management and protection				
3.1 Extend current dormouse nest box schemes to an additional 5 woods.	GWT	MCC, CCW Coed Cymru	Additional 50 boxes into Croes Robert Woods by the end of 2005.	1 2 3
3.2 Train 10 volunteers to check nest-boxes	GWT	VWT	Ongoing (five trained by the end 2004)	1
3.3 Continue to implement wildlife legislation.	Gwent Police	CCW	Ongoing	2
4. Advisory				
4.1 Raise awareness of landowners and managers to dormouse requirements in order to promote appropriate management.	CCW, VWT	MCC, FCW GWT, MS Coed Cymru	Ongoing Projects	2 6
4.2 Support training in conservation of dormice both for land managers and advisors and to provide advice	CCW	MCC, FCW, GWT, VWT,	Ongoing Projects	2 6

on sympathetic management for dormice.		Coed Cymru		
5. Future research and monitoring				
5.1 Survey to identify further dormouse populations (e.g. take part in future 'Great Nut Hunt' national survey). Ensure results are incorporated in a national database and ensure nationally gathered information is relayed back to the local region.	CCW, VWT, GWT, MS	JNCC, MCC, GWT, landowners general public	Ongoing Projects	1
5.2. Develop and apply additional survey methods where hazel is scarce or absent (e.g. use of 'hair tubes')	VWT MS	GWT	Ongoing Projects	1
5.3. Monitor survival of dormice populations at known sites as recommended by VWT.	VWT, GWT	MS, CCW, MCC	Ongoing Projects	1
6. Communications and Publicity				
6.1 Raise public awareness of dormice through production of leaflets and guided walks to promote dormouse conservation.	VWT, GWT	CCW, MCC,	Ongoing Projects	

9. Links with other plans

The plan should be considered in conjunction with any future plans prepared for Woodlands, hedgerows or woodland species.

The Communications and Publicity actions relate to the Public Awareness Action Plan.

10. Sources of information

Data are held by the Gwent Wildlife Trust, Vincent Wildlife Trust and Mammal Society.

References

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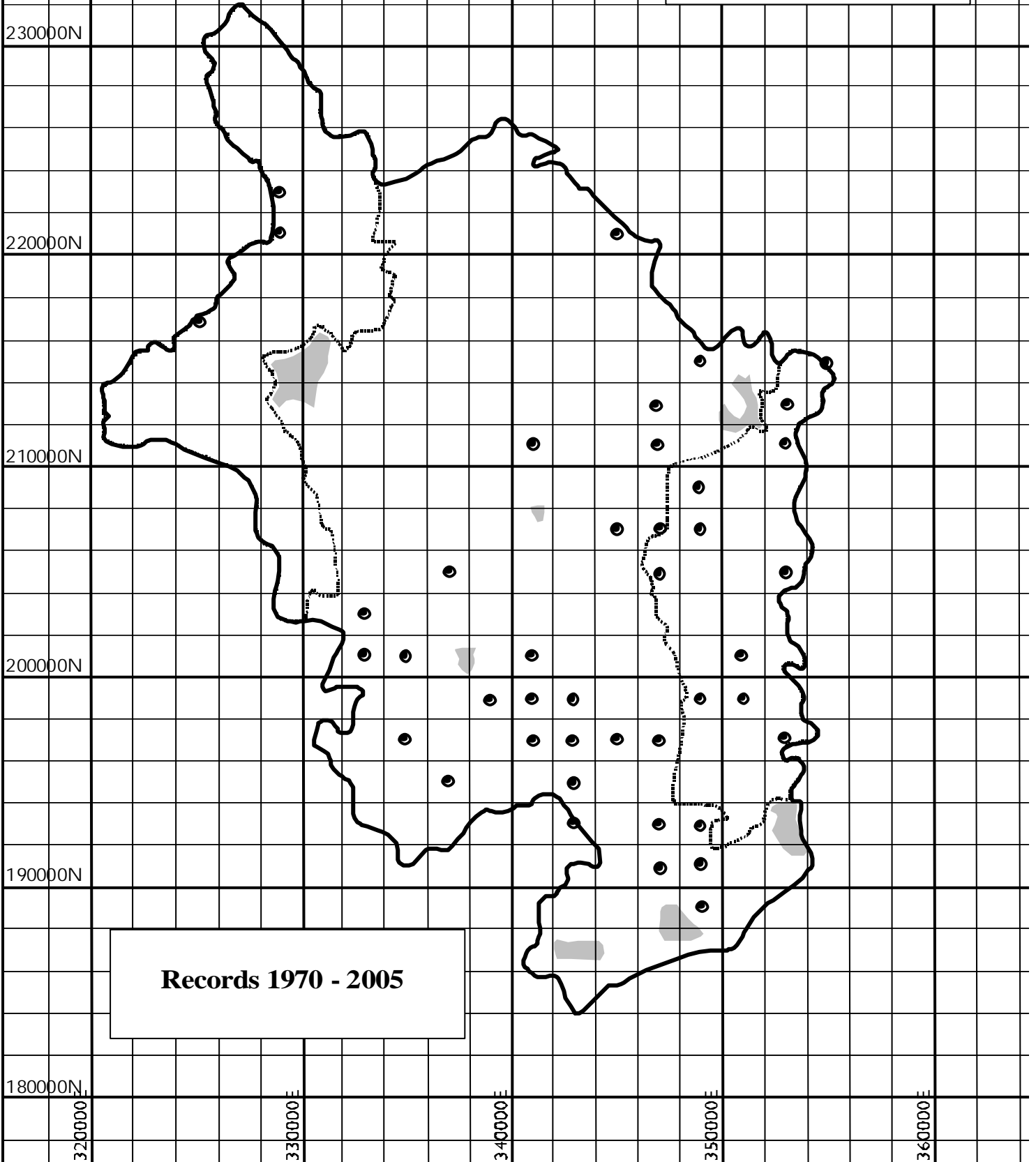
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DORMOUSE



Records 1970 - 2005

Scale 1:250000